# THE EXPANSION OF CHRISTIANITY

RIVIÈRE

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## in the

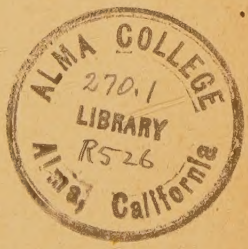
# FIRST THREE CENTURIES

### According to the Conclusions of Harnack

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION FROM THE FRENCH

of

Rev. Jean RIVIÈRE




B. HERDER

ST. LOUIS, MO.
17, South Broadway, 17

LONDON, W. C.
68, Great Russell St., 68

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S^ti. Ludovici, die 12 Junii 1915,

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# INTRODUCTION

The spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire, so striking in its manifestation, gave to Christian Apologetics an argument that was quickly grasped and used to every advantage. When the struggle was at its fiercest, the Christians boasted of their numbers to their persecutors as an indication of strength and as an unmistakable sign of future victory. They call to mind the bold hyperbole of Tertullian, " we are but of yesterday, yet we fill every place among you. [1] "

Privileged as they were to witness the realization of that event so seemingly impossible viz., the Church's triumph over all the powers leagued against her, the Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries see in the spread of Christianity the working of the finger of God, and fearlessly point to it as one of the greatest proofs of their belief. " When I consider their power and their works ", exclaims Eusebius in speaking of the Apostles, " how many thousands of men

[1] *Apol.*, 37.

have accepted their word and how *churches of tens of thousands* have been established by men so deficient and so uncultured — churches built, not in unknown or obscure places, but in the greatest cities, in imperial Rome herself, in Alexandria, in Antioch, in all Egypt, in Lybia, in Europe, in Asia, both in towns and other places, and among all the nations — I am compelled to recur to the question of its cause and to confess that these men could not have undertaken a like enterprise by other than a divine power.[1] "

When St. John Chrysostom wanted to point out to his faithful a convincing proof of their faith, which would be so strong, and at the same time so simple that the ordinary mind might grasp it without much effort, he could find none better, after the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies, than the fact of the world's conversion to Christianity, an argument which he develops with majestic and burning eloquence in his tract, *A Demonstration that Christ is God.*[2] St. Augustine's comment on this proof is classic. " If the doctrine preached by the Apostles was accepted without confirmation of miracles, this very miracle — that the whole world has been converted without the aid of a single miracle — convinces me of its truth.[3] "

[1] *Theophan.*, V. 49.
[2] Cf. I, 9-10, 12-14, 17.
[3] *City of God*, I. 6.

To St. Thomas, the conversion of the world appears " more astounding than all the other prodigies " and as " a certain proof of past wonders. [1] "

From Augustine's time onward, all apologists have appealed to this marvellous expansion of the Church. In the seventeenth century it inspired the genius of a Bossuet and a Pascal. In the eighteenth century we find Bullet exposing it exclusively from pagan and Jewish writers, in order best to refute the rationalists of his time. More recently, it has been the theme of orators like Frayssinous, Lacordaire, and Monsabré, and such historians as Abbé de Broglie and Paul Allard. In a word, it seems that no serious mind considering the disproportion between the means employed and the results achieved, can fail to pronounce this expansion a phenomenon so unique as to be inexplicable in any human way. We need not wonder then, that for ages it has been reckoned as one of the classic proofs for the divinity of the Christian religion.

Yet, may it not be that this proof was nothing more than considerations suggested by a too superficial view of the matter or by an unconscious distortion of the facts, and afterwards hallowed by a rhetoric which has become traditional? Will not a serious and impartial

[1] *Contra Gent.*, I. 6.

study of history completely wreck this self-complacent system of apologetics? It may be that questions such as these, might kindle doubts in the minds of some, especially in an age when criticism is working havoc with so many time-honored theories and correcting so many legends in the light of history. To answer these objections then, or better, to prevent them from ever arising, and at the same time to present our argument as strongly as truth will allow, may it not be well to consult a professional historian, who has no apologetical preoccupation to bias scientific exactness, and whose radical belief places him above suspicion of partiality towards the Catholic Church? These two conditions are found in the person of Adolph Harnack.

This learned professor, who is intimately acquainted with the early history of Christianity, has published a work entitled *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries.* [1] The work has been well received everywhere as the first monograph on this important subject, and as far as the substance of the work itself is concerned has met with favorable criticism on all sides. To be honest, not only is one forced, in reading Harnack, to admire his wonderful erudition, but also if certain arbitrary views such as mar his *History*

[1] *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*[2], 2 vols., with maps, Leipsic, 1906; translated and edited by Jas. Moffat, B. D., D. D., New York and London, 1908.

*of Dogma,* and a few evident traces of old prejudices due to his Protestant training be eliminated, one is impressed on the whole by the absolutely fair objectivity of his study and the calm impartiality of his judgments. It will be interesting, then, to see whether the exposé of the brilliant historian confirms or weakens the traditional apologetics. Without following Harnack into every detail, — for his work is not free from digressions — and without adhering too closely to his plan, we shall endeavor to reconstruct the traditional argument with the aid of the materials he has collected. This will not prevent us from differing at times from his opinions, or from pointing out his mistakes; but we believe that it is possible, while adhering to the substance of his thought, to base this part of our apologetics upon the foundations of impartial history as taught even by one who has no bias in favor of the Church.

# PART I

## THE FACTS

Our first task will be the rehearsal of the facts and a sketch of the extent of the propagation of Christianity in the Roman Empire. Harnack has gone over this ground in the fourth book of his treatise,[1] the newest, as well as the best part of his work. His investigation goes down to the early years of the fourth century, that is down to that period when Christianity, after more than two hundred years of persecution, was finally granted toleration by the secular power and was raised by Constantine to the rank of a *religio licita,* a step which was but preliminary to its establishment as the privileged religion. This date is not arbitrarily chosen; it marks a cleanly defined turning-point in the history of the spread of Christianity. There can be no doubt that the attentions of the secular power at this time, and the assurances that henceforth Christianity's position was secure, added to the Church's cause an

[1] Vol. II.

element of success as efficacious as it was unexpected, and no doubt acted as the determining factors in not a few conversions. The influence of these wholly human auxiliaries makes it impossible to distinguish the part played by religious proselytism from motives of personal interest and political advantage. To correctly gauge the peculiar vitality of Christianity and its spontaneous force, one must consider this new religion as it was before Constantine made it the beneficiary of the prestige and favors of an official patronage.

# CHAPTER I

## *The Historical Development*

Though relatively few, there are not wanting certain texts which have a direct bearing on the spread and diffusion of Christianity. It is by collecting and collating these that Harnack begins his work, [1] and we may feel sure that he has considered none whose authenticity can in the least be questioned. We find in that chapter both a critical inventory of our fund of general sources, and a sketch of the general outlines of the historical development of Christianity in the first three centuries.

Over and above a certain amount of detailed information, the books of the New Testament give us a few general statements relative to the extension of the preaching of the Apostles. "This gospel of the kingdom," said Jesus, "shall be preached *throughout the whole world as* a testimony *to all the nations*". [2] This is the programme. [3] That it reached its full realization is remarked in the final verse of the Second Gospel: "The Apostles went forth and

[1] II. p. 1-32.
[2] Mt. $24^{14}$.
[3] Likewise to be found in Mt. $28^{19}$, and Acts $1^{8}$.

preached everywhere.[1]" In the same strain, St. Paul writes to the Romans that "their faith is being preached *throughout the world.*[2]" In the Acts, we read of the rage of the Jews at finding within their city those missionaries "who were setting *the whole world* in an uproar.[3]" St. John, in his Apocalypse, sees among the elect "a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues.[4]" It is plain, of course, that these words are not to be taken literally, and that while indicating a considerable expansion, they express rather the conviction which the Church had from the very first day of her existence, that she was destined to conquer the whole world. We should understand the words of St. Clement in the same way when he says that "Paul instructed in righteousness the whole world," as also those of St. Ignatius, when he states that "bishoprics are established in the utmost corners of the world.[5]" The same appreciation must be made of the statement of the author of the Shepherd, when he compares the Christian faith to a mighty tree which overshadows the whole earth, and, in another place, represents under the figure of twelve mountains, the twelve tribes

[1] Mk. $16^{20}$.
[2] Rom. $1^{8}$. Cf. 1 Thess. $1^{8}$, Col. $1^{6}$, $^{23}$; 1 Tim. $3^{16}$.
[3] Acts $17^{6}$.
[4] Apoc. $7^{9}$.
[5] Clement, *ad Corinth.* v; Ignatius, *Ad Ephes.* III. 2.

who inhabit the whole world and to whom the Son of God was preached by the Apostles. [1]

There are other sources, however, which give us more accurate information about the state of Christianity in the first century. For Judea, there is the statement of the Acts to the effect that " many thousands of Jews " were converted. [2] For Rome, we have the testimony of Tacitus and St. Clement, both of whom, in speaking of the number of the Christians put to death during the persecution of Nero, use the term " a great multitude. [3] " Still more precious is the testimony of Pliny, who, in his celebrated letter to the Emperor Trajan, describes the great number of Christians in his province, Bithynia, in terms such as these : " The matter seemed to me to deserve attention especially as so many are imperilled. For many of all ages and ranks, and even of both sexes, are in risk of their lives or will be. The infection of the superstition has spread through the cities into the villages and country districts. And yet it seems possible to check and put it right. At any rate, it is quite certain that temples which were almost forsaken are beginning to be frequented; sacred rites long fallen into disuse are being revived; and there is a market for fodder used by the sacrificial vic-

[1] *Sim.* VIII. 3; IX. 17.

[2] Acts $21^{20}$.

[3] Tacitus, *Annal.* XV. 44 (*multitudo ingens*); Clement, 1 Cor. VI (πολὺ πλῆθος).

tims, whereas up till now buyers had been scarce. Hence it is easy to imagine what a multitude of men could be reclaimed, if they had but a chance for repentance." Even supposing that Pliny is exaggerating in order to impress the emperor and thus to dissuade him from taking any wholesale bloody measures against the Christian movement, still the main points of his report must be correct, and they are sufficient to attest the wide diffusion of Christianity.

After having gathered together the data to be found in the writings of the apostolic age, Harnack gives the names of forty-three places in which the existence of Christianity prior to the second century, can be proved historically. To these must be added the provinces of Arabia, Syria, Cilicia, Galatia, Cappadocia, Bithynia and Pontus, Illyria and Dalmatia, places, in which the epistles of Peter and Paul mention in a general way the existence of Christian communities. To sum up the situation in a few words, it can be said that Christianity had apparently taken a firm hold in the East : Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor; it was planted in Alexandria; and had set foot also in the West, in Greece, in Macedonia, in Rome especially, from which place it had already penetrated into Spain. In Rome and Bithynia it was sufficiently well known to have aroused the suspicions of the government.[1]

[1] Harnack, pp. 91-94. On the extension of the Church, of the first century see *L'Eglise naissante* by P. Batiffol, *Revue Biblique*, April 1905, pp. 137-160.

For the second century, the data are more abundant. St. Justin Martyr declares emphatically: "There is not a single race of men, barbarians, Greeks, or whatever name you please to call them, nomads or vagrants or herdsmen living in tents, where prayers in the name of Jesus the Crucified are not offered up.[1]" It would be a mistake to take these statements literally, for they are mainly due to the theoretical belief that the gospel must have spread all over the earth. More than likely they were employed for purposes more or less rhetorical. The precise statement found in the Pseudo-Clementine [Pope Soter? (c. a. 170)] is more to the point: "Our people, then, seemed to be deserted by God; whereas now, after believing, we have outnumbered those (i. e. the Jews) who seemed to have God." In this same period, St. Irenaeus, carried away no doubt by the idea of a united Church scattered all over the world wrote: "Although the languages of the world are varied, yet the meaning of the Christian tradition is one and the same. There is no whit of difference in what is believed or handed down by the churches planted in Germany, or in Iberia, or in Gaul, or in the East, or in Egypt, or in Libya, or in the central region of the world [i. e. Palestine].[3]" He speaks also of many

[1] *Dial.* 117.
[2] 2 Cor. II.
[3] *Adv. Haer.* I. x. 2.

nations among the barbarians who do not know how to write but who believe in Christ, having salvation written in their hearts without ink or paper.[1] Naturally, due allowance must be made for a certain amount of exaggeration in these texts; Irenaeus' testimony, however, has some weight as regards the churches in Gaul and Germany, for of these he could speak from personal knowledge. Exaggeration is more manifest in the case of Clement of Alexandria, when he draws a contrast between philosophy, which was never at home outside of Greece, and the Christian faith, spread over all the world and professed by Greek and barbarian alike and in every nation and city and village.[2]

The statement of Polycrates of Ephesus that he had become personally acquainted with Christians from all over the world,[3] may be taken more seriously, because it is independent of any theory. The pagan Caecilius, in the same epoch, also testifies to the multiplication of what he calls "this impious sect.[4]"

Lest we be tempted to exaggerate the import of these testimonies, we must not forget that Celsus, some years previous, had made out as if the Christians were already *in extremis* owing to the rigor of the persecution of Marcus Aure-

[1] *Ib.* III, IV, 1; cf. II, XXXI, 2, III, XI, 8.
[2] *Strom.* VI, XVIII, 7.
[3] In Eusebius *H. E,* V, XXIV, 7.
[4] In Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, IX. Cf. XXXI, XXXIII.

lius. " If any one of you transgress secretly ", he says, " he is none the less sought for and punished with death. [1] " Celsus, too, without doubt exaggerates in his turn, but he exaggerates in the opposite direction. Nevertheless the mere fact that he could give vent to such an idea proves that there was no question as yet of enormous crowds of Christians throughout the empire.

In order to give a view of the general condition of Christianity at the end of the second century, Harnack draws up a second list of all the new cities in which the presence of Christian communities is attested by trustworthy documents. He finds thirty-three of them; mostly in Asia Minor, though Thrace, Thessaly, the Grecian Isles, Italy, and Africa are also represented. To this list he adds the collective designations of Christian communities in the neighborhood of Antioch and Smyrna, in Asia, in Mesopotamia, in Egypt, in Graecia Major, in Gaul, in Germany, and in Spain. This evidence leads us to conclude that Christianity existed in all the provinces, and that thanks to the churches in Mesopotamia — it had already crossed the frontiers of the empire.

The classic texts of Tertullian belong to the beginning of the third century. " We are but of yesterday, yet we have filled all the places you

[1] Origen *Contr. Cels.* VIII. LXIX.

frequent, — cities, islands, fortified places, townships, markets, the camp itself, the tribes, town councils, the palace, the senate, and the forum. All we have left you is your temples.[1] " So great are their numbers, that the Christians, were they to revolt, would be more formidable than the Mauri, the Parthians, or the Marcomanni; were they merely to leave the empire, their own desolate condition would cause the pagans to shudder; there would be a silence and a stupor as of a world lying *in extremis*. Then he goes on: " You would have been left with more foes than citizens. For nowadays it is owing to the multitude of Christians that your foes are fewer, since nearly all the inhabitants of nearly all your cities are Christians. " There is evidently a great deal of exaggeration in this oratorical outburst. Tertullian himself moderates his tone, when in his letter to Scapula he says that in each city the Christians constitute " almost a majority of the inhabitants. " Further on, in speaking of Carthage, he addresses the proconsul thus: " Should you determine to carry out this policy here, what will you do with so many thousands of Christians, men and women, of both sexes, of every age and rank, all presenting themselves to you? What fires, what swords you will require! " To put to death the Christians, would be to decimate the city,

[1] *Apol.* XXXVII.

would be to strike every one, including the proconsul himself, in the person of some friend or relative. The apologist concludes with his customary vehemence : " Spare yourself, if you will not spare us ; spare Carthage, if you will not spare yourself ; spare the province. [1] "

Elsewhere, to shame the Jews, he points out that the whole world has been converted to Christ. First, he calls their attention to a passage of the Acts (2 9-11) ; then he names the " rest of the peoples : the Gaetuli, the Mauri, all the confines of Spain, the various tribes of Gaul, with places in Britain which, though inaccessible to Rome, have yielded to Christ. Add the Sarmatae and the Daci, the Germans and the Scythians, and many remote peoples, provinces, and islands, unknown to us, which we are unable to go over. [2] " This is rhetoric ; nevertheless, even though these statements be exaggerated we can cull from them precious information regarding those parts of Africa known to him, especially Carthage, which even at this date embodied a large Christian population which was to be further augmented by the fruitful episcopate of Cyprian. [3]

Unlike those which precede it, the testimony

[1] *Ad Scap.*, II, V.

[2] *Adv. Jud.* VII. See also *Adv. Marc.*, III, 20. He affirms in a more general way that the Christians are " more numerous than all the others. " *De Anima*, XV.

[3] Cf. Cyprian, *Ad Demetrium*, XVII : *nimius et copiosus noster populus.*

of Origen is characterized by a truly scientific precision and honesty. Commenting on the text : " The gospel shall be preached in all the world and then shall the end come, " Origen observes that the end of the world is still far off, since the good news has not yet been announced everywhere. " Many people, not only barbarians but even of our empire, have not yet heard the word of Christ... For we are not told that the gospel has been preached among all the Ethiopians, particularly those who are on the other side of the River; nor among the Serae (Chinese), nor in Africa (a region of the western coast of India) has the story of Christ been heard. But what shall we say of Britain or Germany on the seaboard, or the barbarians, the Dacians, the Sarmatae, and the Scythians, most of whom have not yet heard the gospel.[1] " A comparison of these lines with the rhetoric of Tertullian will show the vast difference between the heated statements of the orator and the exact language of the historian.

In his treatise against Celsus, Origen often has occasion to speak of the number of the Christians. He always represents them as a multitude so considerable that the pagans find it a pretext for blaming them with public calamities, as well as for complaining of the toleration of the civil authorities. The gospel is spread

[1] *In Matt. Comm.* series 39.

everywhere for the betterment of men, but wherever there are churches, they are opposed by congregations of sinners.[1] Still he acknowledges that the number of the martyrs is not very large,[2] and that the Christian population in the empire is relatively small. "If indeed Jesus has said, 'Where there are two or three gathered together in my name they shall obtain anything from the Father,' what if not simply a handful of people agree, as at present (ὡς νῦν πάνυ ὀλίγοι), but the whole Roman Empire?[3]" Elsewhere he intimates that there is not a single city that is entirely Christian.[4] Still, when he reflects that the constantly increasing multitude of Christians and the quality of their converts had such humble beginnings, he is confident that the final victory is not far off.[5]

At the beginning of the fourth century, this triumph is on the point of being realized. The pagan Porphyry complains of finding Christians everywhere.[6] The martyr Lucian (311), when brought before the tribunal of the emperor, was able to plead in favor of his belief the testimony of "whole cities" and "almost the greater part

[1] *Contra Cels.* III, 15, 29.
[2] *Ib.* 8 : ὀλίγοι... καὶ σφόδρα εὐαρίθμητοι.
[3] *Ib.* VIII, 69.
[4] *Ib.* III, 30.
[5] *Ib.* III, 9, 10.
[6] The objections of the pagan philosopher in the dialogue apology of Macarius Magnes are thought to have been taken from the works of Porphyry.

of the world.[1] " In one of his edicts, Maximinus Daza, in order to justify the persecution he was inaugurating, recalls the examples of his illustrious predecessors, Maximian Hercules and Diocletian, who were forced to take severe measures " because they saw almost all men deserting the worship of the gods and attaching themselves to the Christian people.[2] " The rhetorical assertions of Tertullian had now become a reality, at least in the East; this fact both Christians and pagans attest.

Eusebius, too, states that Christ is adored throughout the whole world and that the Christian populace, " though a new nation, is admittedly neither small nor weak, nor dwelling in any one corner of the earth, but the most numerous and pious of all the peoples.[3] " He devotes an entire treatise to the history of this development. Christ Himself converted thousands; after His death, the Apostles divided among themselves the whole world and carried the tidings of the gospel to its furthermost limits. Then Eusebius describes in eloquent terms how this church, which appeared like a tiny spark in the time of Domitian, burst into flame during Trajan's reign, and under Hadrian like the most brilliant of luminaries lighted up the whole world. During the reign of Commodus, thanks to the peace she enjoyed, the Christian faith gain-

[1] Quoted by Rufinus, *Hist. Eccl.*, IX, 6.
[2] Eusebius, *H. E.*, IX, 9.
[3] H. E. 1. 3, 19; 1. 4, 2.

ed a foothold among all the different classes of society; finally, when he comes to the eve of the Diocletian persecution, the historian finds himself unable to describe the extent and the prosperity of the Christian communities, where churches are already too small to accommodate the ever-increasing multitudes of the faithful.[1]

It must be admitted, however, that Eusebius, in dealing with this history is often carried away by eloquence at the expense of facts. He evidently has very little information about the beginnings, and the first precise data that he gives refer to the last decades of the second century. Notwithstanding this, the general outline of his sketch is exact, and if supplemented with the testimony of his predecessors, will help us to see the principal steps of the propagation of Christianity. Its spread was slow but continuous; still three remarkable periods in its history can be distinguished; the first marked by the activity of St. Paul; the second, extending over the reigns of Commodus and his immediate successors (latter part of the second century); and the third, in the half-century which preceded the persecution of Diocletian (260-303). In this last period, a larger increase accrued to Christianity, and the Church assumed an importance so great that the empire could no longer afford to ignore it.

[1] These scattered texts of the *H. E.* are grouped together by Harnack, pp. 18-22.

## CHAPTER II

### *Social Penetration*

If numerical importance is a sign of vitality and an element of strength in any religion, of still greater importance is the quality of its members, both as an indication of and a factor in its success. Could Christianity in the beginning, whilst it was boasting of the number of its converts, point also to their social rank? In a general way, the zeal they displayed in the extension of the faith, their consciousness of being the people of God and of possessing the true religion, the impulse to annex any element of worth and value, all these factors are traceable primarily and pre-eminently to the sense felt by Christians of their own strength. In order to verify this feeling and to measure the extent of the expansion of the Christian religion, let us follow it as closely as we may into the different classes of society; or to use the language of Harnack, having viewed the extension of Christianity, we shall now look at its inward spread. [1]

First of all, how far did Christianity spread among the aristocratic and cultured classes?

[1] Book IV, c. II, pp. 33-84.

" There are not many wise according to the flesh among you, " wrote St. Paul to the Corinthians, " nor many mighty, nor many noble. " And the Apostle glories in this fact, seeing herein the design of God, who is pleased to confound the pride and the false wisdom of the world by the aid of insignificant agents.[1] This condition of things is not peculiar to the Apostolic age. For a long time, in fact down to the time of Marcus Aurelius, Christianity had to recruit its members chiefly from among the lower classes, a fact which was eagerly seized upon by the pagan writers and became the occasion for many cheap jests. Christian apologists acknowledged the fact, but instead of trying to excuse it, made it out to be an honor to the Christian religion.[2]

Even from the beginning, however, some people who were wise and mighty were won over to Christianity. In Cyprus, the proconsul Sergius Paulus was converted to the faith;[3] in Athens, Dionysius the Areopagite;[4] in Thessalonica and at Berea, " not a few women of good position " were won over;[5] Pliny informs Trajan that he found, in Bithynia, Christians among all the different orders of life; in Rome, Pomponia Greciana, a noble matron, whose strange

[1] Cor. $1^{26-30}$.

[2] Cf. Lucian, *De Mort. Per.*, 12, 13; Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 5, 8, 12; Origen, *Contr. Cels.*, I, 27, III, 18, 41, VIII, 75.

[3] Acts, $13^{7-12}$.

[4] Acts, $17^{34}$.

[5] Acts, $17^{4-12}$.

change of life is noted by Tacitus,[1] was certainly a Christian, as was also the consul Titus Flavius Clemens and his household, and doubtless also Acilius Glabrion, the senator and *vir consularis,* whom Domitian put to death.[2] In Trajan's reign, St. Ignatius assumes that the Christian community at Rome was so influential as to have the power of hindering his martyrdom.[3] Hermas complains of the laxity of morals induced by prosperity,[4] and Marcion was so well off that he could present the Church of Rome with 200,000 sesterces.[5]

If besides wealth, we look for learning, we will find, as early as the time of the Apostles, the Alexandrian Apollo, who threw the whole city of Corinth into confusion by his subtle eloquence.[6] In later years the men who took up the cudgels in defence of Christianity were undoubtedly men of ability. This was conspicuously true of the so-called "gnostic" scholars and thinkers, such as Valentinus. Tertullian was a distinguished lawyer.[7] Clement of Alexandria evidences the conversion of many philosophers.[8] In the middle of the second century, the school

[1] *Annals*, XIII, 12.
[2] Dion Cassius, LXVII. 14.
[3] *Ep. ad Rom.*
[4] *Shepherd*, *Commandment* X., and *Similitude* VIII. 9.
[5] Tertullian, *De Præscrip.*, 30.
[6] Acts $18^{24}$, 1 Cor. $1^{12}$, $3^{4-6}$.
[7] Eusebius, H. E.. II, 4.
[8] *Stromata*, V, XVIII, 167.

of Alexandria had won renown as one of the greatest academies of the day, and no one dares to belittle the giant intellect of Origen, its brightest light.

The age of Commodus marks a distinct stage in the Christian movement among the aristocratic classes.[1] The celebrated martyr Apollonius was in all likelihood a senator. In two famous Christian inscriptions, which should be dated not later than the end of the second century, we have proof that some members of the *gens Annæa* and the *gens Pomponii* were Christians. Tertullian claims that Christianity had invaded the senate, the forum, and the highest walks of life.[2] Persecution was pictured as a doubly severe test of faith, inasmuch as the confessor forfeited his reputation and his fortune. The second rescript of Valerian (258) against the Christians is directed solely against those of the upper classes.[3] The civil service, too, was widely permeated by Christianity. Dionysius of Alexandria bears testimony to this fact for his own city in the time of Decius.[4] Eusebius informs us that before the persecution of Diocletian there were Christians among the governors of the provinces who enjoyed the confidence of

[1] Eusebius, *H. E.*, V, XXI, 1.

[2] *Apol.* 37, *Ad. Scap.* 4-5.

[3] Cyprian, Ep. LXXX, 1 : *Ut senatores et egregii viri et equites romani, dignitate amissa, etiam bonis spolientur.*

[4] Eusebius, *H. E.*, VI, XLI, 11.

the emperor and were exempted from the duty of sacrifice. In Phrygia there was a town, whose entire population, including officials, were Christians.[1] In a word, "prior to Constantine, the Christian religion had made its way into the government service, just as it had found an entrance, thanks to Clement and Origen, into the world of learning.[2]"

At the Roman court, the Jews even in the time of Augustus were numerous. But the Christians were soon to find their place there. According to unreliable legends, Peter and Paul are said to have stood before Nero, while John was condemned by Domitian in person, and a number of the courtiers are said to have embraced Christianity. But be this as it may, St. Paul certainly does make mention of "the house of Caesar,[3]" as he does also of the households of Aristobulus and Narcissus,[4] both of whom can be identified as persons who stood high in the court of Claudius. Under Domitian, the first cousin to the emperor, Flavius Crescens was a Christian, as were also his children, the heirs-presumptive to the throne. In the proceedings against Justin, under Marcus Aurelius, one of his pupils who was imprisoned with him, was a slave in the royal household, and the well-known Palatine

[1] Eusebius, *H. E.*, VIII, 1, 11.
[2] Harnack, II, 40.
[3] Phil. $4^{22}$.
*Rom.* $16^{10\text{-}11}$.

caricature, which probably belongs to this period, proves that Christians were to be found among the royal pages. Under Commodus, there were according to Irenaeus, many believers in the palace. According to the same Saint, Pope Victor secured the favor of Marcia, by means of which he obtained the release of Christians condemned to the mines of Sardinia.[1] Tertullian testifies that there were Christians in the palace of Septimus Severus, and that Caracalla, his son, had a Christian wet-nurse.[2] Alexander Severus wished to build a temple in honor of Christ,[3] and Philip the Arabian was probably a Christian. Valerian, according to Dionysius of Alexandria, was at first friendly to the Christians whose number at his court was large. When he turned against them, we see him decreeing special penalities against the " caesariani.[4] " Under Diocletian, the court of Nicomedia consisted largely of Christians, and his early rescripts were especially designed to purge the court of them.[5] As would naturally be expected, the number of Christians at the courts of the liberal emperors Constantius Chlorus and Licinius was large.

" This sketch which makes no pretension to be complete, may serve to indicate how Christ-

[1] IV, xxx, 1. *Philosoph.*, IX, 12.
[2] *Ad Scarp.*, 4.
[3] Lamprid., *Alex.*, 43.
[4] Eusebius, VII, 10; Cyprian, *Ep.*, LXXX.
[5] Eusebius, VIII, 1.

ians made their way into the court at an early period, and how they became a factor which was occasionally quite important. [1] "

The army was more incompatible with Christianity than the civil service, both because it ran counter to the principles of the gospel, and because of the danger of apostasy to which the soldier was continually exposed. This is why a strict school of believers insisted on the absolute incompatibility of the military calling and the Christian religion. The Church, however, was more tolerant and never forbade the faithful to enter the army. Under Marcus Aurelius, the twelfth legion (*fulminata*) was made up of a fairly large number of Christians. [2] This was the legion to which the forty martyrs of Sebaste belonged. Tertullian indeed hails with triumph the soldier who refused the military crown for fear of being guilty of idolatry; but his treatise on this case proves that the incident was uncommon and that it was not approved by the other Christian soldiers. [3] The soldier who led Potamiaena to martyrdom in Alexandria (202-203) was attached to the Christian faith; in the same city, during the reign of Decius, a small commando, which guarded some Christians on trial,

[1] Harnack, II, 51-52.

[2] Apollinaris and Tertullian in Eusebius, V, 5. This fact is easily intelligible when it is remembered that this legion was recruited from the region of Militene, which was strongly Christian.

[3] *De Corona*, 1.

turned out to be composed entirely of Christians [1] — and naturally they were not chosen for this duty because of their faith — a fact which shows how widely Christianity had permeated the army. The persecution of Diocletian began with a wholesale purging of the Christians from the army ; a few years later, just before his final struggle with Constantine, Licinius pursued the same policy. [2] The large number of Christian soldiers seemed to demand these precautionary measures ; but conversely this same fact led Constantine to affix the cross to the colors of his regiments.

To sum up. It must be said that, unlike Mithraism, Christianity never became a religion of the camps and did not diffuse itself specially by means of soldiers. Notwithstanding this there were large numbers of Christians in the army, as is evident from the many soldier-martyrs. On the other hand there were also quite a few soldier apostates, who were made to form a special class of penitents in Alexandria. [3]

The women, who played so important a rôle in the primitive churches, were to be a powerful instrument of propaganda. As has already been noticed, the Acts mention many women converts. Priscilla, the wife of Aquila, is spoken

[1] Eusebius, VI, 5; VI, 41, 22.
[2] Eusebius, VII, 1 ; VIII, 4 ; X, 8.
[3] Epiphanius, *Haer.*, LXVIII, 2.

of as an important personage.[1] St. Paul sees fit to deal with mixed marriages,[2] as well as the position of women in the local assemblies.[3] In the salutations at the end of his epistles, he frequently includes the names of women. Thus in the Epistle to the Romans there are 8 women mentioned as compared with 18 men. At an early date there was an order of Christian virgins and deaconesses of whom mention is made in Pliny's letter. The apologists boast that the lowliest Christian woman is better acquainted with divine things than the philosophers. They even belonged to schools, for we find them enrolled under Justin and Origen. Among the heretics they played the rôle of prophetesses,[4] and one readily recalls the notable part they took in the Montanist movement.

The number of prominent women who were either converts or at least favorably disposed to Christianity is extremely large. Mention need be made only of Domitilla, the wife of Flavius Clemens; of Marcia, the favorite concubine of Commodus; of Julia Mammaea, the mother of Alexander Severus, who invited Origen to see her; of Severa, the wife of Philip the Arabian, with whom Origen corresponded;[5] lastly, of

[1] VIII. 2, 36.
[2] 1 Cor. $7^{12}$.
[3] 1 Cor. $11^{5}$.
[4] Irenaeus, 1, 13, 2, 7. Tertullian, *De Praes.*, 41.
[5] Eusebius, VI, 21, 36.

the wife and the daughter of Diocletian, who were gained over to the faith. Tertullian mentions that the wife of Claudius Herminianus, governor of Cappadocia, was a Christian. [1] St. Hippolytus does the same for the wife of a governor of Syria, whose name he does not give. [2] Eusebius claims as a Christian the wife of the prefect of Rome under Maxentius, who, like another Lucretia, preferred death to dishonor. [3] Tertullian composed a special treatise against the luxurious life of rich women, and it will be remembered that under Pope Callistus, the question of the marriage of noble women came up. The persecutions made no distinction between men and women and this explains the fact that the number of female martyrs is relatively great and significant. The last persecutor, Licinius, decreed special measures regarding the worship and religious instruction of women. [4] Taking it all in all, the number of women converted to Christianity was greater than that of men, at least in the upper classes. The decree of Callistus permitted women of noble birth who were unable to find a husband of their own rank, to contract an illegal union with a slave. The Council of Elvira attests the preponderance of girls, which is taken as a pretext for mixed

[1] *Ad Scap.*, 3.
[2] *Comm. in Dan.*, IV, 18.
[3] Eusebius, VIII, 1.
[4] Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* I. 53.

marriages (*propter copiam puellarum*) [1] — though this does not prevent the council from forbidding such unions.

The evident conclusion of this brief outline is that Christianity was never merely the religion of a caste, but that, on the contrary, it took in all degrees and classes of society, and at an early date was a strong social force.

[1] Can. 15.

## CHAPTER III

### *The Geographical Development*

In order to gauge fully the force of Christianity in its onward progress, there still remains the inquiry into its comparative diffusion over the various parts of the empire, in a word, we must now trace its territorial expansion. To this end, Harnack devotes the last chapter of his work, employing for his study of the question, the data of history found here and there together with the Christian inscriptions, regarding which our information as to contents and date is inferior, and the episcopal signatures appended to the various synods and councils, especially those of the Nicene Council. [1] It is well to bear in mind that the documents at our disposal are few and fragmentary. Many, indeed very many, places at which it is impossible to prove that a Christian community existed previously to the Council of Nicaea, may nevertheless have contained such a community and even a bishopric. This is Harnack's own view of the case and we unhesitatingly share in it.

[1] It is true that the council was not held until 325 ; still it can be considered as representative of a more ancient condition of affairs, since the reign of Constantine did hardly witness, for the East at least, the creation of any new bishopric.

Palestine, the cradle of Christianity, was not destined to be a centre of its great development. Besides the first missions described by the Acts of the Apostles, there was at Jerusalem, as we know, a community of converted Jews, governed at first by the twelve and then by James "the brother of the Lord". When the city was invested by Titus, the Christian forsook it and emigrated to the country beyond the Jordan (Pella), where they were soon joined by brethren from Galilee and Samaria. This evidently supposes that the local church was small. In the regions of Damascus and Decapolis, the Jewish Christians led rather poor and uninteresting lives. Justin estimates their number to be smaller than the converts from paganism, and Origen, almost a century later, places their number at less than 144,000.[1] The Roman colony of Aelia Capitolina, founded on the ruins of Jerusalem never rose to any great importance: it was not long, however, before it had a community of Gentile converts, who received a bishop in 136. But it came into notice only under bishop Alexander, at the beginning of the third century. The political and religious life was transplanted to Caesarea. The Christian population was considerable in that city and under Origen it became a second Alexandria in point of theological learning and activity. Eusebius mentions

[1] Justin, *I Apol.*, 53; Origen, *Comm. in Joan.* I. 1.

the fact that there were numerous martyrs in Caesarea under Diocletian, and he refers to neighboring communities, but unfortunately he does not specify the localities. Eighteen bishops from Palestine attended the Council of Nicaea. On the other hand, there were no Christians at all in Tiberias and the neighboring region, which formed the headquarters for rabbinic learning.[1] They were not very numerous in the region south of Jerusalem; the bishop of Gaza lived outside the city, from which point he governed his small community; at the end of the fourth century, the bishop Porphyry found there only 127 Christians, while the surrounding villages were entirely pagan. Ascalon and Anthedon remained entirely pagan as late as Julian's reign.[2]

With Judaism holding sway in the north and paganism holding its own in the south, no effective work was done in Palestine by the Christians prior to the age of Constantine, and even then the attempts of the emperor to definitely acclimatize Christianity in Palestine did not succeed. In the Hellenistic towns, Christians were to be met with, but even there — with the exception of Caesarea perhaps — they were not very numerous.

The situation was almost the same in Phoeni-

[1] Epiphanius, *Haer.* XXX. 4, 11.

[2] Eusebius, *H. E.* VIII. 3; Sozomenus, VII. 15; Marcus, *Vita Porphyrii.*

cia. Acts speak of Christians at Tyre, at Sidon and at Ptolemais. Tyre was a metropolitan see in the third century, and martyrs, in or from Tyre, during the great persecution are noted by Eusebius. This province sent eleven bishops to the Council of Nicaea. But the bishop of Emessa, like the bishop of Gaza, was constrained to live outside the city. It was not until after 325, that Heliopolis received from Constantine, its first bishop and its first church; yet paganism was still preponderant there during the fourth century. [1] In short, Christianity secured a firm footing in the Hellenistic towns along the seaboard, but the inland districts of the country remained almost entirely pagan in the main, and there seems to have been a powerful revival of the old national cults in the third century.

The Syrian countries received the gospel at an early date. It was at Antioch that the Christians first received their name [2] and it was there that the first attempts were made to purge the new religion of the old Mosaic prescriptions, all of which are so many indications of the important rôle that the rich metropolis was to play during the first centuries. Thanks to Eusebius, we possess a list of the Antiochene bishops, among whom are St. Ignatius Martyr, the apologist Theophilus and Serapion, whose writings

[1] Euseb., VIII. 13; *Vit. Const.*, III. 58; Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.*, IV. 19.

[2] Cf. I Pet. $4^{16}$, Acts $11^{26}$, $26^{28}$.

have perished. Famous schools of learning were held by Dorotheus and above all by Lucian. In 251 A. D., apropos of the Novatian controversy, a council was convoked at Antioch, in which Dionysius of Alexandria was invited to take part, together with bishops from nearly all the parts of the East, from Bithynia and Pontus to Mesopotamia. [1] Some time after this, the famous bishop, Paul of Samosata was in position to live as a prince. Of the three synods convoked to condemn him, the last numbered 70 to 80 bishops in the assembly. These facts bear witness to the political and religious importance of the Church of Antioch. Its Christian population was large and about the year 320, there were several churches in the city. If the local Christians really were in the majority in Julian's reign, and if, as he attests in several passages, St. John Chrysostom preached in what was substantially a Christian city, their number must have been very large as early as the opening years of the fourth century.

The districts around Antioch were successfully evangelized. The priest Lucian of Antioch speaks of whole cities (*urbes integrae*) converted to the faith, and his statement certainly was guided by his information of his own country. Eusebius tells us that during the last persecution the prisons were packed with members of the

[1] Cf. Eusebius, VI. 46, VII. 5.

clergy. [1] The fact that at Nicaea there were 20 bishops and 2 chor-episcopi from all of the several districts of the province, points to uniform diffusion of Christianity in this country.

Antioch exercised a strong influence both politically and religiously, over the Isle of Cyprus and the province of Cilicia. Cyprus, evangelized by Paul and Barnabas, sent to Nicaea three bishops. Nor were these all. This for an island of no great size meant a strong church. Cilicia was the first fruits of the apostolate of St. Paul, himself a native of Tarsus. Our information regarding its subsequent history is extremely scanty. In the middle of the third century we find mention of a metropolitan, Helenus, together with " other bishops of that district ". At Nicaea, Cilicia was represented by 5 bishops and 1 chor-episcopus. These numbers would indicate that considerable progress had been made in the Christianizing of this province.

From Antioch Christianity diffused itself throughout the East, especially in the independent state of Osrhoene. We find a Christian literature in the Syriac as early as the middle of the second century. Towards the year 190, there were enough bishops in the state to hold a council anent the Easter controversy. Some years later, king Abgar with his whole court embraced

[1] Eusebius, VIII. 6.

Christianity. [1] Edessa had a larger percentage of Christians among its population than any of the larger towns during the period previous to Constantine. There were also Christians in Nisibis and in several other towns which sent 5 bishops to the Council of Nicaea. But at Carrhae, Dea Luna still retained her altars and her worshippers. Silvia declares (c. a. 385) that not a single Christian was to be found there. [2] Edessa was a centre of the apostolate for the Orient, especially for Mesopotamia and Persia. Dionysius of Alexandria (c. a. 250) gives the names of churches founded there together with their relation with other churches, and Eusebius informs us that they also possessed martyrs during the persecution of Diocletian. Unfortunately the beginnings of Christianity in Persia are veiled in doubt, yet the bloody persecution of Sapur, in the fourth century points to a serious spread of Christianity in the course of the preceding century. The apocryphal Acts of Thomas evidence the existence of Christian communities in the N. W. territory of our modern India, during the third century.

The large regions south of Palestine and Mesopotamia which bear the name of "Arabia" a country never subdued by the Romans, possessed but a few Christian communities in the chief

[1] Eusebius, V. 23; Bardesanes in Euseb. *Praep. Evang.*, VI. 10.
[2] *Peregrinatio Silviae*, 20; Theodoret *H. E.* VI. 15.

towns. Origen took part in at least two provincial councils held there. Some years earlier he himself had been championed by a council of Arabian bishops. Bishop Beryllus of Bostra (c. 249) is well known for his letters and his christological errors.[1] Six bishops from Arabia attended the Council of Nicaea. It was only at a later period that efforts were made to introduce Christianity among the nomad tribes of the desert.

Up to 180 A. D. our ignorance of the history of the Church in Egypt is almost total. That year marks the appearance for the first time of a stately church with a complete ecclesiastical organization and a famous theological school. For the times prior to 180, we know only that the activity of the Gnostics Basilides and Valentinus was exercised there. Eusebius asserts that Mark preached the Gospel in Egypt and founded "churches".[2] The names of his successors have not come down to us except in the fictitious list given in the Chronicle of Africanus. Eusebius again informs us, that in 202, under Septimus Severus, there were *myriads* of martyrs — the number is certainly exaggerated — from Egypt and all the Thebais.[3] Towards the close of his life (230) Demetrius held synods

[1] Eusebius, VI. 20, 37; Jerome. *Ep.* XXXIII. 4.

[2] Eusebius, II. 16. This plural is very significant. It implies that Alexandria was a sort of province.

[3] Eusebius, VI. 1. 2.

against Origen. Information gleaned from the correspondence of Dionysius, which unfortunately has come to us badly mutilated, together with the statement of Eusebius that many Christians were martyred for the faith in Alexandria, the *libelli* of the apostates recently discovered in very small villages, as also the development of monasticism, would show that Egypt, towards the middle of the third century, was one of the countries in which the Christians must have formed a considerable number. At Nicaea there were 22 Egyptian bishops, and in 339, St. Athanasius counted close upon a 100 bishops in Egypt. If this latter statement be true, there certainly could have been few less in 325. [1]

It would be difficult to surmise the number of the Christians in Egypt. This much can be said, however, that the Christians soon outnumbered the Jews and that their number, at the beginning of the fourth century totalled over a million.

In Pentapolis (Cyrenaica), there were, according to St. Irenaeus several churches at the end of the second century; in the middle of the following century Dionysius of Alexandria addresses a letter to Basilides the metropolitan of the province, a fact which supposes that there

[1] *Apol. c. Arian.* 1, 71. It should be remembered that for Egypt the episcopal lists can give but a very incomplete idea of the state of Christianity, for as is well known, many of the churches were ruled simply by priests and deacons.

were a number of bishops. [1] Origen seems to know of traces of the Apostolic preaching among the Ethiopians. [2]

Even taking Egypt into account, Asia Minor is the Christian country *par excellence*. It was one of the first visited by the Apostles. Peter and Paul labored there; John resided at Ephesus; and the daughters of Philip came to Phrygia. St. Ignatius sends greetings to some of its numerous and flourishing communities. Before Trajan's reign we are sure that there were more than 20 churches. We have the testimony of Pliny for Bithynia in the north, who complains that Christianity has invaded the country districts and is professed by persons of all stages and ranks. During the course of the second century, our sources supply fourteen fresh Christian towns — a number which evidently is far below the actual. In Asia proper, Ephesus was the custodian of the most precious Christian memories, a fact which Polycrates matches with the Christian glories of the Roman church in the famous Easter controversy. Smyrna was made illustrious by St. Polycarp, and Sardis by the apologist Melito. The outbreak of the Montanistic heresy towards the end of the second century is strong proof of the vitality of the faith in these regions, especially because of the

[1] Eusebius, VII. 26.
[2] *In Matt. Comm.*, Ser. 39.

numerous councils convoked to condemn the new error. Between 230 and 235, two great synods held at Iconium and Synnada, apropos of the validity of the baptism of heretics, were attended by bishops from every part of Asia Minor; and every one knows what an important part in this controversy, Firmilian, the celebrated metropolitan of Caesarea in Cappadocia, was to take, some years later. In Phrygia and in the neighboring provinces, Christian influence is emphatically affirmed in the still existing inscriptions. Dionysius of Alexandria, in speaking of these regions, says that they possessed " the most populous churches ". [1] The remarkable apostolate of St. Gregory Thaumaturgus of Neo-Caesarea in Pontus, proves with what rapidity Christianity established itself in these provinces throughout this same period.

At the beginning of the fourth century, the royal household and the court were full of Christians. In Phrygia there was a city whose entire population was Christian. In Amasia in Pontus, a city of secondary importance, there were many churches. Finally, Maximin in his edict of persecution, was certainly deeply impressed by the districts around him, when he stated that " nearly every one " had gone over to Christianity. [2] All these facts are so many

[1] In Eusebius, VII. 7.

[2] Eusebius, VII. 2, IX. 9; *Vit. Const.* II. 1, 2.

proofs of an almost complete Christianization of Asia Minor. These countries were represented at the Council of Nicaea by a hundred bishops; and the single fact that Isauria remote and wild as it was, sent 13 bishops and 4 chor-episcopi is enough to reveal the local strength of Christianity. There were bishops even from the extreme northern districts of Pontus Polemoniacus, which is east of the Black Sea. From this country the faith was soon to penetrate into the Georgian territories. Finally, and this is an important fact, Armenia, an independent kingdom beyond the Roman frontiers, evangelized in the third century by Gregory the Illuminator, was officially Christian.

From here on, we cannot rely much on the signatures of the Council of Nicaea, chiefly because but few of the Western bishops were present. Our other points of information become more and more scanty. We have but a faint knowledge of the Balkan peninsula. Thrace must have had numerous churches before 325, and the communities at Corinth and Thessalonica were always in flourishing condition. The others are scarcely known, a fact due to their lack of eminent men. We are told, however, by Melito, that the emperor Antoninus Pius wrote to the cities of Thessalonica, Athens and Larissa forbidding any rising against the Christians, [1]

[1] Eusebius, IV. 26.

a proof that the number of the faithful in these regions must not be underrated. Harnack accepts the number of bishops given by Duchesne for a later period, and makes it hold good for a time around the year 300. This list assigns 3 bishops to Euboea, 1 to Attica, 10 to Northern Greece, and 7 to the Peloponnesus. There were also Christians in the Grecian Isles, for the bishops of Rhodes, Cos, and Lemnos were present at the Council of Nicaea. About 170 A. D. Dionysius of Corinth wrote epistles to Gortyna and Cnossus in Crete. Inscriptions attest the presence of Christians in almost all the Grecian Isles.

In the provinces along the Danube, Moesia, Pannonia and Noricum the progress of Christianity was very slow. Still there were a number of martyrs in these regions during the last persecution, and they sent 3 bishops to the Council of Nicaea. In the time of Eusebius these communities were considered "youthful". [1] As regards the country beyond the Danube, the conversion of the Goths began before the middle of the third century. Some Christian prisoners taken in a raid through Cappadocia in 258 began the work of evangelization.

The beginnings of Christianity in the West are obscure throughout. The church of Rome

[1] *Vit. Const.*, IV. 43.

was founded in the early days of the Apostolic age. — As early as St. Paul there were several Christian communities there.[1] Under Nero a great number of Christians were martyred, whilst under Domitian, several members of the imperial family were won over to the faith. Dionysius of Corinth, in 170, congratulates the Roman church on its charity which has already become proverbial.[2] From the *Acta Justini* we learn that the church had grown so large that the members could not meet in one place of worship. A few years later, Pope Soter, declares that Christians in Rome were already superior in numbers to the Jews. Under Commodus, Christianity made large advances, especially among the upper classes. It was at this time also that schools of theology, both orthodox and heretical were established. Fabian (236-250) divided the city into seven districts over which he placed as many deacons. Decius declared that he would rather have a rival emperor in Rome than a bishop. In 251 A. D. Pope Cornelius wrote that his church numbered 155 members of the clergy together with 1500 widows or needy persons who were maintained and fed.[3] Here we have an indication that the actual number of Christians in Rome must have been at the very least 30,000, and probably as high as 50,000,

[1] Rom. 16.; Phil. $4^{22}$.
[2] In Eusebius, IV. 23.
[3] Eusebius, VI. 43.

thus forming from 3 °/₀ to 5 °/₀ of the total population. These numbers certainly had increased twofold in the period that elapsed between 251 and 312. Shortly afterwards the popes began to organize the parish churches. In 300, according to St. Optatus, there were at Rome more than 40 basilicas. Finally, Eusebius relates that Maxentius, at the beginning of his reign, feigned friendliness towards the Christians " in order to cajole the people of Rome " ; [1] but as the tyrant later persecuted the Christians, too much weight must not be attached to this testimony. At the same time it must not be overlooked that the majority of the aristocracy were still pagans.

For the south of Italy, we have, besides the inscriptions and the acts of the martyrs, the signatures of 19 bishops present at the synod of Rome held in 313. We also know, that, in 250-251, Pope Cornelius convoked against Novatianus a council which was attended by 60 bishops all Italian. [2] Hence the number of episcopal sees under the patriarchal domain of the bishop of Rome, in the year 250, may be safely estimated at not less than a 100. This number must have increased considerably during the remaining portion of the century, and we can easily believe that at the beginning of the fourth century, almost every town of any size had its bishop

[1] Eusebius, VIII. 14.
[2] Eusebius, VI. 43.

The case, however, is different for the north of Italy, into which Christianity entered late and slowly. The first bishopric of Piedmont, was founded about the middle of the fourth century. At the Council of Sardica, in 343, the bishop of Ravenna is the twelfth titulary of that see, a fact which would indicate that this bishopric dates from the end of the second century. Like indications show that the see of Milan goes back to the first half of the third century, and that of Aquileia, to some time previous to the persecution of Diocletian.

Africa enjoyed too intimate relations with Rome, not to have received the gospel at an early date. Yet we know scarcely anything of its history before the record of the martyrs of 180, a fact which presupposes the presence of Christians both in Carthage and Numidia. Tertullian, at the end of the second century, speaks of Carthage as a flourishing church and mentions communities as afar as Mauretania. At the beginning of the third century, Agrippinus was able to summon 70 bishops to a council to discuss the validity of heretical baptism; 90 bishops attended a synod at Lambaese presided over by Cyprian's predecessor, Donatus.[1] Cyprian himself enjoyed the repute and wielded the influence of a provincial governor. He made many proselytes to Christianity and in the per-

[1] Cyprian, *Ep.* 71 and 69, 10.

secutions of Decius, the apostasies amounted to thousands. His church was so well off and so populous that in a single collection, the sum of 100,000 sesterces ($ 4,000 — $ 5,000) was raised. [1] During the controversy on heretical baptism a number of synods were called at which many bishops assisted; for the council of 256-257 a list of 87 bishops present, together with their sees, from all over the province is given, the least number coming from Mauretania. It must not be overlooked that the bishops unfavorable to Cyprian were not present — and they were many (*plurimi*) to use the expression of Cyprian — a fact which justifies us in assuming that the total number of African bishops in the days of Cyprian was about 150. Up to 303 the number of Christians in Africa followed a geometrical progression: the persecution of Diocletian brought out a great number of martyrs and also made a great many apostates; at the time of Constantine and of the Donatist schism, Christianity was *the* religion of Africa, [2] and 250 bishoprics can be shown to have existed. Asia Minor alone could compare with Africa in the extension and density of the Christian development.

Of the beginnings of the Church in Spain as little is known as of the Church in Africa. Notices in Irenaeus and Tertullian make it sure that

[1] Cyprian, *Ep.* 62.

[2] The edict of Constantine reported by Eusebius. X. 5. 18.

there were Christian churches in Spain, but neither writer gives us any precise indications. Later, St. Cyprian in a letter shows that there were Christian communities at Leon, Astorga, Merida and Saragossa and that the Spanish bishops had held a synod of their own. The acts of the martyrs clearly point to the presence of Christians in the principal towns. To complete these scanty details, we have the acts of the Council of Elvira (303) which were signed by 10 bishops and a great number of priests representing all the provinces, and its decrees which reveal an intense Christian life.

The southern part of Gaul and the Rhône valley must have received the faith not later than the middle of the second century. For Marseilles the evidence is inferential, but it is certain for Vienne and Lyons, thanks to the precious letter which these churches addressed to their brethren in Asia Minor apropos of the persecution of 177. Yet the communities here cannot have been large since but 49 victims are mentioned and in the appendix, now lost, the list of the surviving members was given. Later, St. Irenaeus asserts that there were Christians among the Celts. Disregarding the many unreliable legends, there must have been Christians in the larger towns, which at this period were not numerous in Gaul. At the time of the Easter controversy, according to

Eusebius, [1] a synod was held under the presidency of Irenaeus. Harnack affecting to be more conservative than Duchesne, admits that at this period there were several bishoprics in Gaul (p. 264). In the following century progress was slow. The *Passio Saturnini* asserts that "the preaching of the apostles shone throughout our country with but slow progress, since only a few churches in some of the states, and these thinly filled with Christians, stood up together for the faith."

In the west and in the north, few, indeed hardly any, had, before St. Martin in the fourth century, received the name of Christ in these regions. There was no church in Tours before Constans. The bishopric of Treves was not founded till the second half of the third century, and the community there was so small, that down to 336, one little building sufficed for the worship. Even during the fourth century the city remained substantially pagan. What was true of Treves was practically true of Gaul itself, apart from the south-west and the region of the Rhône, for it was not till after the middle of the fifth century that its population became practically Christian. At the close of the fourth century, however, from the records of the Councils of Arles (314) and of Rome (313) we know that

[1] *H. E.* V. 23.

there were in existence twenty bishoprics, namely, in Narbonensis — Vienne, Arles, Marseilles, Vaison, Nizza, Orange, Apta and Toulouse; in Lugdunensis — Lyons, Autun, Rouen, Die, Paris and Sens; in Aquitania — Bordeaux, Eauze, Mende, Bourges; in Belgica — Treves and Rheims. The investigations of Duchesne render it likely that there were Christians in 22 other towns, though no bishops, at least in the majority of cases. Yet, at the same time, if even a small town like Die had a bishop, then we must assume that the episcopal sees were more numerous than we can prove in detail from our documents. The fact that Constantine during his last sojourn in Gaul was impressed by, and later converted to Christianity should preclude us from placing too low an estimate on its importance.

The Church history of Germany begins with the statement of Irenaeus that there were churches in Germany. He gives no indication of their situation. All we know is that the bishop of Cologne attended the councils at Rome and at Arles; yet his community must have been small for in 355 it had no more than one "little conventicle.[2]" In Lower Germany, Tongern may

[1] They are: Angers, Auxerre, Beauvais, Châlons, Chartres, Clermont, Digne, Embrun, Grenoble, Langres, Limoges, Metz, Nantes, Narbonne, Noyon, Orleans, Senlis, Soissons, Toul, Troyes, Verdun, and Viviers.

[2] *Amm. Marc.* xv. 5, 31.

perhaps be a pre-Constantine bishopric; but this is not true for Upper Germany where there appears to be no bishopric prior to Constantine. As for Rhaetia, we can trace Christian churches at Augsburg and Regensburg previous to Constantine. In the great enumeration of Christian provinces given by St. Athanasius, Germany is never mentioned. [1] Likewise there were few Christians in Britain. It is quite possible however, that by the end of the second century, some Christian missionaries had set foot there and carried on the work of evangelization. We know that there were martyrs there during the Diocletian persecution, and we know too that there were three British bishops present at the Council of Arles. Still it was only in the fourth century that Great Britain was Christianized with remarkable rapidity.

It is then clear that Christianity was unequally spread in the provinces, but yet is found everywhere. This universality becomes the more striking if compared with the extension of Mithraism. [2] Harnack here adopts the conclusions of Cumont, and consequently he assumes that Mithraism, like Christianity made little headway in the military confines of the empire. Even the

[1] *Apol. c. Arian.* 1. Yet at the time of St. Hilary, the ecclesiastical organization was complete in Germany.

[2] Harnack, p. 317-321. We may pass over the propaganda of the heretical sects, both because their expansion is veiled in obscurity and because their adherents were recruited from among those converted to Christianity.

favor of the emperors of the third century who sought to make it the shield and safeguard for all the rest of the decaying cults of paganism produced but artificial and ephemeral results. Mithraism, therefore, although it enjoyed the privilege of a *religio licita,* did never and could never become a serious rival to Christianity.

* * *

Do the preceding facts furnish sufficient data for an estimate of the numerical strength of Christianity? Harnack thinks not, because so little is known of the Empire at the beginning of the fourth century. This is why the statistical calculations of different authors vary considerably. Some have estimated the number of Christians at about a twelfth of the total population; others at a twentieth; others again at a fifth, and others still at a half.

With no precise figures at hand, we can at least attempt a classification of the provinces in comparing the percentage of the Christians to the total population. Harnack arranges them in four groups.

The first takes in the provinces in which Christianity numbered nearly one half of the population and represented the standard religion. These are : our modern Asia Minor, the region of Thrace opposite Bithynia, Cyprus, Armenia and Edessa.

The second embraces the provinces in which Christianity formed a very important section of the population, influencing the leading classes and being capable of holding its own with other religions. These are : Antioch and Cœle-Syria, Egypt and the Thebais especially Alexandria, Rome, Lower Italy, and certain parts of Middle Italy, proconsular Africa and Numidia, Spain, the principal parts of Greece and the southern coast of Gaul.

The third includes the provinces in which Christianity was thinly scattered. These are : Palestine, Phoenicia, Arabia, certain districts of Mesopotamia, the interior of the Greek peninsula with the Danubian provinces, the north and east of Italy, Mauretania and Tripolitana.

Finally, the fourth group is made up of the provinces in which the spread of Christianity was extremely slender, or where it was hardly to be found at all. These are : the towns of ancient Philistia, the north and northwest coasts of the Black Sea, western Upper Italy, Middle and Upper Gaul, Belgica, Germany and Rhaetia, perhaps also Britain and Noricum.

The great degree of difference between the evangelization of the Orient and the Occident is particularly striking. But considered on the whole, there can be no doubt that Christianity had a powerful expansion. It was not confined to a single class, but penetrating as it did the city and country districts, it became an important

factor in the life of the empire. It is generally admitted that at the end of Constantine's reign, there were 1800 bishoprics. Reducing these figures slightly we gain a fair estimate of the state of the Church at the beginning of the fourth century. We cannot be far wrong in supposing that at this period there were some 800 or 900 bishoprics in the East, and some 600 or 700 in the West. Hence we can conclude that the triumph of the Church was virtually accomplished and Constantine had nothing to do but to recognize the fact. [1]

Such are Harnack's conclusions in regard to the propagation of Christianity. Though differing in minor details, they coincide on the whole with those of Paul Allard. [2] The facts thus established may be regarded as incontestable. In accepting them we shall occupy a midway position between biassed negation and prejudiced affirmation, on the solid ground of historic truth.

[1] Harnack, 331 f.
[2] *Ten lectures on the martyrs :* first and second lectures.

# PART II

## THE CAUSES

After having traced the propagation of Christianity in history, and having indicated the principal features which characterized the rapidity, the power and the extent of its development, our next step, in order to gauge the value of this fact, is to ascertain the causes at work. This is precisely what Harnack has sought to do in three of the four books that make up his volumes, two of which are entirely and the third partly directed to this end. The point he seeks to establish is this : Being given on the one hand, the intellectual and social condition of the empire in the first century, and on the other, remembering the remarkable growth of the Christian religion, the development of Christianity was normal, being no more than the adaptation and harmonization of its doctrine with its environment.

For the development of this thesis, the learned author has combined all the resources of an erudition, both penetrating and extensive, with a rare talent of exposition; but it is easily perceived

how such an essay in the philosophy of history is almost inevitably destined — even with unquestionable honesty — to result in as many subjective appreciations as scientific conclusions. The trammels of system readily open the way to the danger of distorting the calm view of facts; the philosopher may easily and unduly influence the historian.

This is what has happened to Harnack in more than one instance; this is why sincere critics have been forced, in this particular portion of his work, to make important reservations, which we in turn have not failed to indicate. All in all, we are in the presence, it seems, of a historical synthesis both powerful and true. At any rate, there is an advantage in expounding the system such as it is, because of the tribute it pays to the vitality of Christianity; it will be easy afterwards to perceive the postulates it supposes and the gaps it reveals. And perhaps, both by this impartial exposé and by the corrections which it suggests, our apologetics will be benefited.

# CHAPTER I

## *The Environment*

Despite the fact that Christianity was launched as a religious system in Jewish territory, it did not take root there. At an early date it was transplanted to Graeco-Roman soil, where it developed rapidly. At a first and a rather superficial glance, nothing appears more incongruous than the association of the Christian life and teaching with this pagan and corrupt society; yet various causes were at work in breaking the ground for the rise and the growth of the Christian influence.[1] The first of these was Judaism.

Long before the Christian era, Judaism had overrun the narrow confines of Palestine and diffused itself throughout the pagan world. By the time of Sulla, Strabo[2] relates that there were Jews in every city and province; some years later, Seneca complains that "the customs of this most accursed race have prevailed to such an extent that they are everywhere received".[3] They were thickly massed in Mesopotamia and in

[1] Harnack, pp. 1-83.
[2] Quoted by Josephus, *Ant.*, XIV. 7.
[3] Quoted by St. Augustine, *The City of God*, VI. XI.

Syria they were found in great numbers. According to Philo, their total number in Egypt was at least a million, or nearly 13 °/₀ of the entire population. Of the five civic quarters of Alexandria, two were called " the Jewish " since they vere mainly inhabited by Jews. At Rome, four years before our era, a Jewish embassy sent from Palestine to the emperor, was joined by 8,000 local Jews. Twenty-four years later (19 A. D.) when Tiberius banished the whole Jewish community from the imperial city, 4,000 able-bodied Jews were deported to Sardinia,[1] a number which answers to a total of at least 10.000 human beings. All told, there were, in the first century, four to four and a half millions of Jews in the empire, representing almost 7 °/₀ of the total population.

With their commercial genius, the Jews carried with them into foreign lands, their religion. It is a well established fact that, because of the great distance from the Temple and their contact with pagan communities, the Jews, without, however, losing any of their haughty uncompromising spirit, were forced to simplify their religious observances and to make recruits, i. e. to augment their numbers by proselytes. Thus freed from all legal formalism and reduced merely to the preaching of one only God, who

[1] This fact is recorded in Josephus, *Ant.*, XVIII, 3, 5, and in Tacitus, *Annal.*, II. 85.

was both Creator and Judge, Judaism, presented herself to the world, in direct opposition to an ambiant idolatry, with all the charm of an elevated monotheism and a pure morality.[1] The superficial observer, and especially the rude populace, saw in the Jews nothing but atheists; but the educated man deemed their religion to be indeed a lofty philosophy. This propaganda found only an obstacle in the essentially national character of Judaism. Hence, true converts from paganism were rare; but great indeed was the number of "God-fearing" souls who were inspired in different degrees by Jewish doctrines and morals.

The primitive Church saw in the Jews nothing but implacable and treacherous enemies, and, as a matter of fact, they were the instigators of several of the persecutions. But this should not make us forget that the Jews themselves had served as the precursors of the Christians, and by that very fact, had been of prime assistance to the Christian movement.

The pagan world was also in a position to offer to Christianity, most advantageous predispositions. Hellenism, especially furthered as the highest form of civilization, had produced a comparative unity of language and ideas. The empire had effected a political unity; the ground

[1] Harnack makes much capital of the fact reported in Mk. $12^{28-31}$. Here he sees a typical case of the "reduction" of Judaism to great central principles.

was prepared for a universal church. As a consequence, there existed the peace indispensable for the religious propaganda, there were exceptional facilities for international traffic and the blending of different nationalities; from Antioch to Cadiz, from Alexandria to Bordeaux, the merchant, the soldier, the professor, were to be encountered.[1] Side by side with the unity of the empire, there developed also the idea of the essential unity of mankind; humanity appeared above national jealousies, the Roman law became the law of the nations. At the same time, ancient society was gradually decomposing into a democracy. The religious policy of Rome suffered the different religious forms to survive and guaranteed them a certain amount of liberty; the existence of associations permitted them to form themselves into unopposed but compact organizations. About the same time, the irruption of the Syrian and Persian religions began to be felt within the empire. These had certain traits in common with Christianity and although the spread of the Church was at first handicapped by them, any such loss was amply made up for by the new religious cravings which they stirred within the minds of men, cravings which could not finally be satisfied apart from Christianity.

[1] Origen had already pointed out the providential rôle played by the empire, *Cont. Cels.* II. 30.

Finally, for various reasons, the exact sciences were on the decline and the vogue of a mystical philosophy of religion with a craving for some form of revelation began to rise.

All these several causes, political, intellectual, and social, brought about a great revolution in the ancient world, a revolution which tended to transform a narrow world into a wide world and a rent world into a Greek and Roman unity; a revolution which must have been highly conducive to the spread of the Christian religion.

Likewise a revolution took place in the inner world of religion, within the very souls of men. On the one hand, official paganism began to disintegrate visibly. When Christianity made its appearance, polytheism had not yet been eradicated, but there were ample forces present which were already sapping its vitality. The swarms of religions which made themselves felt from the time of the conquest, tended to weaken it, and the unity which it endeavored to maintain through the State religion and the protean cultus of the sun was too external not to be ephemeral. Furthermore, philosophy and morality rose up in opposition to it and ridiculed and resented the absurdity and indecency embodied in its myths. As a consequence, it became no more than the State religion, chaotic and antiquated, with very little power of resistance.

At the same time, there appeared a revival of

the religious feeling in the hearts of men, which first of all began to revivify the old national religions, by re-introducing traditional customs and by restoring the sites of the oracles and the places of worship. But especially because of the blending of different civilizations and of the progress of thought, an interchange of Oriental philosophy and the old Greek philosophy, was taking place. From this interchange, new life was about to be infused into the old beliefs, under the form of a religious syncretism, of which the Gnostic systems are examples. Traditional myths were retained; but interpreted and purified, as well as harmonized, and vivified by new ideas, the main features of which are the following. There was the sharp distinction between the soul and the body with the tendency to regard the soul as being of another world in its origin and destiny. There was also the sharp distinction between God and the world. In consequence of these divisions we have the sublimation of the Godhead, who is represented as great and good, as the invisible and incomprehensible principle of all things. There was also the depreciation of the world and the flesh, all contact with either being regarded as a humiliation and a stain. But as man is actually in contact with them, there was always present the yearning for redemption which spelled for him freedom from the world, the flesh and death, and would enable him to return to God

through a series of stages, just as he departed from God by stages. This freedom implies a double element, intellectual and moral; the knowledge which perceives and the expiation which purifies. There was likewise the wavering belief that redemption or the redeemer was already present " either in some ancient creed which simply required to be placed in a proper light, or in one of the mysteries which only had to be made more generally accessible, or again in some personality whose power and commands had to be followed, or even in the spirit, if only it would turn inward on itself ". [1] There was further the conviction that the means of salvation must be embodied in visible sacraments, in material realities which are the efficacious agents of the divine life. All these thoughts are summed up in the general idea that the religious knowledge and the sanctification of the soul are the business of the individual, independent of the state or society, and that every man must realize them by personal effort tantamount almost to asceticism. Such were the directive principles of this syncretic philosophy, and it takes little effort to see how largely they coincide with the fundamental elements of Christianity.

The new religion met with paganism under these conditions. " From its opposition to

[1] Harnack, p. 32.

polytheism it drew that power of antithesis and exclusiveness which is a force at once needed and intensified by any independent religion. In syncretism again, i. e., in all that as a rule deserved the title of 'religion' in contemporary life, it possessed unconsciously a secret ally ".[1]

How then did Christianity take root in a soil thus prepared for its reception? According to Harnack, Jesus, far from giving any command upon the evangelization of the Gentiles, neither anticipated nor foresaw for His doctrine any other horizon than that of ancient Israel. Only in protesting against all formalism and proclaiming the love of the Father as His principal doctrine, can it be said that He founded a universal religion. The spirit rather than the letter of His words, by a sort of immanent and spontaneous vital force, conduced much to impel the Apostles to the conquest of the world.[2]

They began by preaching to the Jews exclusively and the first converts more than ever held fast to Judaism. Yet the apostles lost little time in preaching to the Gentiles. It is not quite clear

[1] Harnack, p. 35. In the same passage Harnack asserts that this way of thinking, monotheistic at bottom, blended perfectly with polytheism with its system of eons, intermediate beings, semi-gods and deliverers.

[2] This theory, manifestly systematic and false as it is, takes up six pages of the work (38-43). It has been admirably refuted by de Grandmaison, *Etudes*, Aug. 20, 1903, pp. 459-471; by Batiffol, *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique*, Jan. 1904, pp. 54-61. Cf. Jacquier, *Université catholique*, 15 oct. 1903, p. 291.

how the Gentile mission arose. Certainly Paul was not the first missionary to the Gentiles. We are justified in believing that the transition to the Gentile mission was imperceptible, and that the movement was carried on afterwards with irresistible energy under the stress of existing conditions, as well as on account of the persecution of the Jews. Stephen had already proclaimed the fall of the Temple and the death-knell of the old Mosaic system; Philip the deacon, and Peter too, baptized proselytes. These, however were but isolated cases; yet, soon after, at Antioch, real pagans were converted, who immediately began to evade the legal observances. Paul gave further impetus to this movement by the powerful influence of his apostolate and his transcendant theological teaching. For him Judaism is positively abolished; Christianity is the universal religion; the evangelization of the pagans is more than a mere right, it has become a duty. And moreover, Paul was followed in this view by Peter, as also perhaps by several of the other early apostles.[1] Hence whilst the Judaizers who obstinately clung to the legal observances, died a lingering death, equally suspected by the Jews and Christians, the Church recruited her members more

[1] It has been justly remarked how far these pages of Harnack mark a progress over the narrow and partial criticism of the Tübingen school. Cf. Lejay, *Revue d'Histoire et de littérature religieuses*, May-June, 1905. p. 323.

and more largely from among the Gentiles and the pagans.

"And what an ordeal this religion underwent in the tender days of its childhood: 'Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred unto a land that I will show thee, and I will make thee a great nation'. Islam rose in Arabia and has remained upon the whole an Arabic religion; the strength of its youth was also the strength of its manhood. Christianity, almost immediately after it arose, was dislodged from the nation to which it belonged; and thus from the very outset it was forced to learn how to distinguish between the kernel and the husk."[1]

Thus history reveals on the one hand, the religious cravings which were at work in the Graeco-Roman world, and on the other, it bears witness to the early transplanting and the rapid development of Christianity. Is this not a proof that they were made, one for the other?

[1] Harnack, p. 64. Cf. pp. 68-69. The principal agent in this expansion was St. Paul, who, with indefatigable energy, planted the gospel all through barbarian countries, among the Greeks and Latins, in Asia Minor and in Greece, and perhaps even in Spain.

## CHAPTER II

### *The Christian Doctrine*

If the new religion found external conditions apparently favorable to its propagation, it also presented itself as endowed with most splendid intrinsic possibilities. The soil was well prepared and the doctrine of Christianity imbedded itself in it as a vital and fruitful germ.

" On the one hand, it was so simple that it could be summed up in in a few brief sentences and understood in a single crisis of the inner life; on the other hand, it was so versatile and rich, that it vivified all thought and stimulated every emotion. It was capable, almost from the outset, of vieing with every noble and worthy enterprise, with any speculation, or with any cult of the mysteries. It was both new and old; it was alike present and future. Clear and transparent, it was also profound and full of mystery. It had statutes, and yet rose superior to any law. It was a doctrine and yet no doctrine, a philosophy and yet something different from philosophy. Western Catholicism, when surveyed as a whole, has been described as a *complexio oppositorum,* but this was also true of the Christian propa-

ganda in its earliest stages."[1] This variety of aspects, besides attesting the wealth of the Christian religion, rendered it capable of adapting itself to the needs and tastes of every one. This is why a successive consideration of its various phases leads to the discovery of the secret of its attraction and the reason of its success.

The Christian religion was presented to the world with a religious doctrine of a wonderful simplicity. We find it summed up in one short phrase of the Pauline writings: "You turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who hath delivered us from the wrath to come."[2] The living and true God who is worthy of all our homages, Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour, the foundation of faith and hope — this is the simple and unchangeably fruitful theme of the Christian preaching.

In place of the cold divinities and coarse idols of paganism, the Christians announce the only God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the all-powerful Lord of mankind and the great disposer of human history. And furthermore they proclaim Him as being no longer the national God of the Jews. He is not bound to any race nor to any people. He is the God of all the souls that desire to serve Him in spirit and truth. He is also

[1] Harnack, p. 84.
[2] 1 Thess. $1^{9-10}$

the Father who demands and is worthy of love. Furthermore, the Christians made the central theme of their preaching the message which tells of Jesus Christ who came from heaven in order to make known the Father, who suffered in doing good, died for man's sins, and from His seat at God's right hand will return for the judgment.

Simple souls knew no more than this, nor did they need to know more, for it can be easily perceived how the germ of the greatest wisdom was embodied in these few principles.

The mere preaching of these doctrines marked a strong protest against polytheism and idolatry. Christianity, however, further supplemented this by direct attacks and waged war to the death with this system.[1] But it must not be overlooked that pagan philosophers had preceded the Christian teachers in their polemics, and that in the minds of a large number, paganism was already discredited. Such a condition of affairs afforded the Christians an excellent opportunity for presenting themselves as the exponents of common sense and morality. So they attacked the divinization of men which was practically realized under the form of the worship of the Caesars.[2] The Christians were always loyal subjects; they paid their taxes and respected the law; they even

[1] Book II, c. IX. pp. 279-291.

[2] Like a genuine Protestant, Harnack lets it be understood that idolatry reappeared again in the Church as early as the third century, with the cultus of the saints. Cf. pp. 292-293.

prayed for the emperor; but they refused to adore him. To have for ever destroyed this political religion, this identification of God with the state, the essential concept of the ancient world, is the crowning glory of Christianity.

Undoubtedly Christian teaching revealed a decided originality over the systems that preceded it. Still we must not believe that the preaching of the true God tended to alienate the minds of the majority of men; rather the reverse. For here the well-disposed spirits of paganism found realized, with a splendid certainty, all which heretofore had been dimly and vaguely felt.

In its teaching in regard to one's neighbor, Christianity may be described "the gospel of love and charity."[1] Next to the love of God, the love of neighbor is the greatest commandment. The Christians are brothers in Jesus Christ and brothers with one another. From this conception the law of pardon, of mercy and of devotion was but a step. The effective love which the Christian exercises towards his neighbor is the means of proving his love for God. For this reason, the gospel, which at bottom is individualistic, is also pre-eminently social, each Christian being entirely at the service of his brethren. In his little churches, where each person bore his neighbor's burden, the Apostle rightly hailed the dawning of a new humanity. Hence the many texts enforcing brotherliness and minister-

[1] Harnack, p. 147 f.

ing love. " The new language on the lips of the Christians was the language of love."[1] And it was more than a mere language, for we shall soon see what works were required to translate it into action.

To the individual, Christianity presented itself as " the gospel of redemption and healing ".[2] This is the meaning of the whole ministry of Jesus Christ. He cured the sick; He called to Himself the afflicted and sinners; He was the physician of both body and soul; this appeared to be the aim of His whole life.

Even His death continued and completed the saving power of His mission because it taught mankind that the sufferings of the just are the saving force in human history. This is why Jesus was pre-eminently preached as " the Saviour ". Furthermore, this point of doctrine became the dominant conception of the disciples which they communicated to the world with all the ardor of their passionate natures. Now, the ancient religions were harsh and unfeeling to human misery; the sick and sinners were excluded from the worship of the gods and these austere divinities admitted to their altars only pure and sound worshippers. But at the epoch of which we are speaking, the religious temper was undergoing a change. Under the double influence of philosophy and the Oriental relig-

[1] Harnack, p. 148. Even the name " brethren " which the Christians assumed is evidence of their great charity and love.

[2] Harnack, pp. 101-124.

ions, attention was drawn to the miseries of mankind, especially to the souls eager for cure. We have a striking evidence of this change in the wide-spread cultus of Aesculapius. During the second and third centuries, he was worshipped as " God the Saviour " on all sides. Men hastened in crowds to his temples and they invoked him for both the maladies of soul and body; they heaped upon him the richest offerings; they even consecrated their lives to him. Celsus also assures us that in his sanctuaries miracles took place. [1]

Into this world of craving for healing, Christianity made its way, and posed as the religion of salvation. For all the Christian teachers, as for St. Paul, all men outside of Christ were sick, grievously wounded by sin which destined them to eternal death. But for this implacable evil Christianity announced a cure. Baptism is the salutary bath which confers a new life and assures those who are faithful of immortal happiness. " So much, at least, the world of paganism could understand. It could understand the promise of bliss and immortality resembling that of the blessed gods. And not a few pagans understood the justice of the accompanying condition, that one had to submit to the regime of the religion, that the soul had to be pure and holy before it could become immortal. Thus

[1] Origen, *Contr. Cels.* III. 3, 24. Apollo and Jupiter also played an analogous rôle. They could be gods only as they were saviours. Harnack p. 103.

they grasped the message of a great Physician who preaches ' abstinence ' and bestows the gift of ' life '." To this cure of souls the Church directed all her teachings and all her rites. She presented herself, concludes Harnack in a strange but expressive formula, " as the great infirmary or the hospital of humanity ". [1]

Hence the comparison of sin and passion to disease, of Jesus Christ and His ministers to physicians, of the Christian precepts and the sacraments to remedies, forms, if I may use the expression, a common topic in the early Christian literature. It may be added here, that this theory received daily application in the care which the Church took for the relief of physical maladies. But more of this later on. Yet this is unquestionably enough to show the superiority that Christianity enjoyed over the other religions and what an attraction it must have exercised upon the souls of men. Yet Harnack thinks that there lay in this state of continued pessimism, the danger of submerging forever the esthetic sense, perhaps of even compromising the moral sense. Happily, he says, this tendency was neutralized by the sentiments of a lofty morality with which Christianity inspired its adherents at all times.

For the gospel is also " the religion of the spirit and power, of moral earnestness and holiness ". [2]

[1] Harnack, pp. 109–112.
[2] Harnack, p. 199 f.

All Christianity, from a practical point of view, is dominated " by the idea of retribution, that is to say in short by the sovereignty of morality ". This ideal rested on a double principle, the one present, the other future : the idea of Christ living in each soul and the idea of a future judgment. Conseqently the Christian must abstain from all sin and must observe the law of continence, a law which not only implies especially the avoidance of all impurities, but also the renunciation of the world and its pleasures and its riches, as well as the obligation of charity, of poverty and of mortification. Those who regard this as exaggerated asceticism, forget that renunciation of the world makes men competent to exercise an influence upon it, and that revolutions in any case are not effected with rosewater. Certainly we are dealing with a revolution here, since the question at stake is the overthrow of polytheism in order to make place in the world for the majesty of God and the reign of good (p. 198 f.).

Consequently it is superfluous to recall that all the N. T. writings teem with precepts in regard to morality, and the same must be said of the works of the Apostolic Fathers. " The entire labor of the Christian mission might be described as a *moral* enterprise, as the awakening and strengthening of the moral sense... Beyond all question, these Christian communities seek to regulate their common life by principles of the strictest morality, tolerating no unholy mem-

bers in their midst, and well aware that with the admission of immorality their very existence at once ceases." Above all they fought all sins of the flesh together with their consequences, as also the sins of cupidity, dishonesty in trade, lying and deceit. "Christians were to be pure men, who do not cling to their possessions and are not self-seeking; moreover, they were to be truthful and brave." [1]

Rightly then did the apologists proclaim the excellence of Christianity as one of the weightiest of arguments in favor of its divinity. [2] Later, when this primitive ideal was blurred by the weakness of human nature, Christianity continued to elevate mankind to perfection. This she did by reconciling souls morally weak, by the sacrament of penance. Without ceasing to be preeminently the religion of morality it had become the religion of unlimited forgiveness, and thus further attracted the hearts of men.

Beautifully and marvellously attractive in its constituent principles, the Christian doctrine was not a whit less so in its secondary features.

At all times it was, by the manner of its teaching "the religion of authority and of reason". [3] It imposed itself upon men by faith,

[1] Harnack, 206-208. This moralizing activity of Christianity is completed by the battle which it waged against luxury, the theatre and games of all sorts. Cf. p. 300-304.

[2] See especially Aristides, 15-16, Justin, *I. Apol.* 15-16. Christian virtue is apparent even in the name of "saints" that they delighted in naming each other.

[3] Harnack, pp. 219-239.

a faith so absolute as to be neither argued nor discussed. This is the charge repeatedly brought forward by Celsus, [1] and St Paul had already made the boast " to bring into captivity every understanding unto the obedience of Christ ". [2] Yet he warns the faithful to be on their guard against the seductions of " vain philosophy ". [3] Tertullian vehemently maintains that there can be nothing in common between Athens and Jerusalem, " between the Academy and the Church ". [4] But far from being a serious obstacle, this dognatism was rather a gain, for it drew men to the Church by the very security and trustworthiness of its affirmations. But at the same time Paul claimed that " the depths of the riches and wisdom of God " lay back of Christianity, and thinking men discovered there a philosophy in full conformity with the best data of their reason. All are conscious of having found the light which revealed to them God, the world and their own being. From this feeling which became the brightness and the joy of the simple faithful, Christian philosophy took its rise, was given a further impetus by the apologists and was definitely shapened by the Alexandrian school.

Over and above its claim as the religion of authority and of reason, Christianity posed as

[1] Origen, *Contr. Cels.* I. 9, 12, 26; III. 4; VI. 10.
[2] 2 Cor. X. 5.
[3] Col. II. 8.
[4] *De Praesc.* VII.

the religion of mystery. It became the more intelligible and impressive to the many hearts that were restless " for sensuous pledges " which afforded them evidences of a mysterious power. Everywhere there was question of the gnosis and of mysterious and divine rites. As the religion of transcendental knowledge it revealed the divine world in its highest perspectives. It promised for the other life, the divinization of the body and the soul. It offered men sacraments; water which washed the soul of stain; the bread and wine which are the body and blood of Christ and which guaranteed immortality, not to mention the manifold unctions and ritualistic ceremonies into which the entire Christian worship was soon to be assimilated. [1]

Harnack is too much of a Protestant not to see in all these so many corruptions of the gospel; [2] but he agrees that this was a necessary adaptation, which, on the whole was beneficial since sacraments and mysteries served to redeem the profound essence of Christian truth from an insipid rationalism. And if for many souls these sacraments and mysteries have tended to materialize the religion of the spirit, let it not be

[1] We may remark how expressive the symbolism of baptism is, in that it signifies the rebirth to a new life, and how this rite is far less repugnant than circumcision and the bloody purifications of the Oriental cults. Cf. 381-383.

[2] P. 229-231. He goes so far as to say that a large amount of polytheism was brought into Christianity by means of the back-door (p. 232). Fr. de Grandmaison justly observes that these pages of Harnack are " the most rabid and the most unjust in all his work. " *Etudes*, Aug. 5, 1903, p. 313, note 3.

overlooked that on a great many others they had a stimulating effect, " lending them wings to soar up into a supra-sensible world " (236-237).

The possession of so many prerogatives filled the Christians with a lively feeling of their superiority, a feeling expressed in the formula " the tidings of the new people and of the third race. " They felt and represented themselves as the perfect Judaism, as a new religion and as the primitive religion restored. They regarded themselves as the people of God and the centre of human history. The least of their number could claim : our people is older than the world ; the world was created for us ; everything in the world is subject to us ; all is revealed to us ; we shall take part in the judgment of the universe. All these convictions led to a self-consciousness than which " nothing more comprehensive or complete or impressive... can be conceived. [1] "

One book sufficed to express and at the same time to justify these convictions. This was none other than the Bible which became in reality the divine chart of the Christian. True it is, that Christianity, unlike Islam and rigid Calvinism never became the religion of a book ; but it was not long before the Christians appropriated the Old Testament denying the right of the Jews to its possession, and gave it an important place in their belief. It was here that they found the narratives of the origin of the world and

[1] Harnack, pp. 239-240.

of humanity : narratives with which Christianity triumphantly challenged the absurd legends of Greek philosophy. It was here also that they showed to the pagans precepts of a wisdom superior to all their philosophies.[1] They seized upon the prophecies particularly, from which they argued that Christianity was predicted thousands of years before. On these same prophecies they based the providential continuity of history and traced the Christian religion to the very beginnings of humanity.

Furthermore, the Bible was regarded as the oldest of all books, from which all other books were plagiarized. This is one of the *leit-motivs* of Christian apologetics in the second century. All true pieces of knowledge whether they occurred in Homer, the poets or the philosophers, were claimed as Christian. "The audacity of this assertion is apt to hide from us at this time ..... the grandeur and the vigor of the self-consciousness to which it gives expression." Against the rites and methods of worship of pagansim which furnished actual or alleged parallels to those of Christianity, it was argued that the demons had imitated Christian rites, or better still, had forestalled and had given a distorted copy of Christianity previous to its appearance with the object of discrediting it beforehand. This strange philosophy of history finds a ready

[1] Tatian, among others, attests from his own personal experience the apologetic rôle of the Old Testament. *Orat.* 29.

explanation in the consciousness that Christians had of being the original people at the dawn of human history, as also by the feeling that they were actually the centre of the universe. The Christians' confiscation of these rites and ceremonies simply denotes the assertion of their character as ideally human and therefore divine. In incorporating them into her system, the Christian religion did nothing more than reclaim her primitive possession. [1]

At the same time, Christianity adopted whatever was good in pagan philosophy, although Christian teachers always claimed they were in possession of a higher truth. Indeed, some of the extremists, like Tatian and Tertullian, could see nothing good in pagan philosophy and consequently abused it bitterly. Yet the majority, whilst recognizing the errors of profane thought delighted in finding in it bits of truth and what they regarded as the outline of revelation. Thanks to Justin and the school of Alexandria, this latter tendency prevailed and became the foundation of Christian philosophy. [2]

How rich and how manifold is the Christian religion as it appears for the first time to the pagan world! Everything that can possibly be considered as religion, it possessed, nay, it was. It reunited in itself all the elements of a universal religion. It mastered every force and every

[1] Harnack, pp. 254-256.
[2] Harnack, pp. 294-295.

idea and made them all serve its own ends. It realized the most perfect syncretism. Compared with it, how poor, how meagre, how narrow are the other religions of the empire! Yet unconsciously it owed much to them, for they fertilized the ground for it, and the new grain which fell upon it, was to germinate and fructify. [1]

Another fact manifests this syncretism of Christianity, namely, the faculty of attracting all peoples. It had repudiated the nationalism which had paralyzed Judaism. It drew all men, despite their differences in state and education. Valentinus is a contemporary of Hermas, and both are Christians; Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria are contemporaries, and both are teachers in the Church; Eusebius is a contemporary of St. Anthony, and both share in the same faith. Still it was the middle of the third century that saw Christianity in full bloom as the syncretistic religion, when the Church, with its hierarchy now strongly intrenched in a sovereign authority, set about, both in her theology and in her worship, to throw the doors open to Hellenism. Of this adaptation, the doctrinal system of Origen is a theoretic specimen, while a practical example of it is found in the apostolate of his disciple Gregory Thaumaturgus, so lenient to pagan tendencies. [2]

[1] Harnack, pp. 312 f.

[2] The reason for this charge lies in the fact that Gregory in order to hold the people, replaced the pagan feasts by feasts of the Christian martyrs. His efforts were highly successful as we learn from

Christianity had set about to conquer the world; but in this endeavor it was forced to combine foreign elements with its own pure essence. Fortunately, it had retained the power to strip off various forms and unite itself to new coefficients. The Reformation made a beginning in this direction, a beginning which we of today ought to continue.

Harnack's philosophy of history calls for many qualifications. It is not the place here for showing how the Hellenization of Christianity was not as complete, nor as destructive to the pure essence of the Gospel, as is sometimes imagined. The mere enunciations of these conclusions revealing as they do the liberal Protestant back of the historian, are sufficient evidence of the systematic tendency which produced them. Yet we can maintain that Christianity did know how to adapt, to assimilate and to utilize all the vital forces of ancient thought, giving thereby the better proof of its own divine vitality.

Gregory of Nyssa, whose words Harnack gives in full (II. pp. 206-207). But this is far from being idolatry.

## CHAPTER III

### *The Christian Life*

Not merely did Christianity preach the sublimest of doctrines, its adherents lived them. The high maxims that it inculcated were not new to the pagans by any means. But what appeared novel and strange to them, was, that from the very beginning, Christianity made them realities of daily life. To the lesson Christians added example, and the excellence of their teaching received a perpetual and beautiful commentary from their daily life.[1]

Christians, first of all, led a life intensely religious. The essential dogmas of their faith, the fatherhood of God, the saving power of Jesus Christ, life eternal, far from remaining a dead letter, inundated their souls and inspired their every thought and action. "No mode of thinking was more alien to early Christianity than what we call deism. The early Christians knew the Father in heaven; they knew that God was near them and guiding them; the more thought-

[1] For the sake of clearness we have separated the theoretical side from the practical in Christianity. Harnack studies them together. This may be better to give a complete idea of the Christian influence, but we think they will be better understood if studied separately.

ful were conscious that He reigned in their life with a might of His own. This was the God they proclaimed. And thus, in their preaching, the future became already present; hard and fast recompense seemed to disappear entirely, for what other recompense was needed by people who were living in God's presence, conscious in every faculty of the soul, aye, and in every sense of the wisdom, power, and goodness of their God? Moods of assured possession and of yearning, experiences of grace and phases of impassioned hope, came and went in many a man besides the apostle Paul... It was only in rare cases that the image of Christ's person as a whole produced what may be termed a 'Christ-emotion' which moved people to give articulate expression to their experiences... Yet in how many cases of which we know nothing, the image of Christ must have been the dominating power of human life!" [1]

First, this divine action found an outward echo in the expulsion of devils.[2] Satan was considered the great adversary of the kingdom; the Christians regarded him as the source of all sin and disease and the direct agent responsible for the idolatrous worship. This is why Christ expelled them from the demoniacs. After Him and through Him, the Church continued His work, not merely confining herself to the work of casting out the devils who had taken possess-

[1] P. 99.
[2] P. 125 f.

ion of individual souls, but even going so far as to exorcise the social life. Hence the apologists delighted in pointing out as a proof of their faith, the power which the followers of Christ exercised over Satan and the confessions which they wrung from him.[1]

The spirit of God was likewise manifested in manifold supernatural gifts; These *charisms,* already referred to by St. Paul,[2] were characteristic of the history of the early communities. God appeared to His saints in visions, dreams and ecstasies to console or to guide them; frequently dead martyrs appeared to their friends. At the missionary addresses of the Apostles or the evangelists or at the services of the churches which they founded, sudden movements of rapture were experienced full of terror or joy. Prophets rose up to explain the past, to interpret the present and to foretell the future. Souls were inspired to improvise prayers and hymns and psalms; others are unconsciously moved to set their spiritual emotions in writing; others are so filled with the spirit that their enthusiasm is expressed in stammering speech, which can be interpreted, however, by those who have the gift. They cured the sick and they cast out devils. The Spirit reveals Himself to all to impel them to symbolic actions, as well as to deeds of heroism.

These extraordinary manifestations of the

[1] Cf. Justin, *II. Apol.* 6; *Dial.* 85; Tertullian, *Apol.* 23; Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 27.

[2] I Cor. 12, 14.

Spirit, particularly conspicuous in the beginning, endured until the second century. St. Irenaeus confirms this view, for he never lost sight of them.[1] In the third century they had almost completely disappeared. Origen attests merely their traces;[2] and in the fourth century, Eusebius looks back upon them as bygone history.[3] Still, these supernatural gifts were of primary importance for the propaganda of the Christian religion, because they were more numerous and incomparably more perfect than those of the other religions.

But the best charism was unquestionably that of morality. In some of the brethren this morality attained a wonderful degree of perfection so much so that it became the divine sign *par excellence*. It consisted in a faith so strong as to move mountains, in an affectionate devotion which was more admirable and more expressive than all the prodigies, in an attentive and anticipant charity which acted as surely as the divine Providence. The life of the majority of the brethren was so pure and so elevated that the apologists laid special stress upon it and hailed it as the triumph of their faith over all philosophy. They were especially fond of extolling Christian virginity and the courage of their martyrs.[4]

[1] *Adv. Haer.* II. 32, 4.
[2] *Contr. Cels.* I. 2, II. 8.
[3] Eusebius, *H. E.* III. 27.
[4] Aristides, 17; Justin, *I Apol.* 14, 29, 60; *II. Apol.* 10-12; Tatian, *Orat.* 29; Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 36-37; Tertullian, *Apol.* 46, 50; *Epistle to Diognetus*, 5-7.

We have already indicated above what sanctity was demanded of the Christians; it is historically certain that it was in the majority of cases actually realized.

The pagans themselves bear testimony to Christian purity of life, and their admissions are precious to recall. Pliny, in his official report to Trajan, declares that he found nothing criminal among the Christians; they bound themselves mostly to avoid theft, adultery, deceit and all dishonest practices. Lucian ridiculed the Christians as credulous fanatics, but he also recognized their purity of life, their spirit of sacrifice, and their courage in the presence of death. Celsus, too, finds no fault with their moral conduct, and all he finds to reproach is their superstition and their obstinacy. Lastly, we have the explicit testimony of the physician Galen : " The Christians seek their faith from parables. Still, they occasionally act just as true philosophers do. For their contempt of death is patent to all of us, as is their abstinence from carnal pleasure; they include women and men who have practiced continency all through their lives, and they also number individuals who in ruling and controlling themselves, and in their keen pursuit of virtue, have attained a pitch not inferior to that of real philosophers. "

Later, it is true, the doctrine of penitence permitted sinners to enter; but this was a recoil on the primitive ideal. Nevertheless the Church continued without intermission, to maintain, by

all her laws, the moral level, and we can even say that the life of the Christian communities never ceased, despite some deterioration, to have a powerful attraction for the well born.[1]

Of all the Christian virtues, perhaps the newest, and at any rate the most admirable was charity. This virtue afforded more than any other opportunities for most striking examples.[2]

" By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another " had said the Master; [3] and this precept was obeyed to such a degree that the pagans themselves were struck by it. " By secret signs and marks " observes the pagan Caecilius, " they manage to recognize one another, loving each other almost before they are acquainted." [4] Tertullian remarks that the charity of the Christians brands them in the eyes of many of their opponents. " Only look ", they say, " look how they love one another. Look how they are prepared to die for one another".[5] " For their original law-giver ", says Lucian in his turn, " had taught them that they were all brethren, one of another... They become incredibly alert when anything of this kind occurs, that affects their common interests. On such occasions no expense is grudged. " [6]

[1] P. 214 f.

[2] P. 147 f. This chapter on " the Gospel of love and charity " is the most interesting in Harnack's book.

[3] Jn. $13^{35}$.

[4] Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 9.

[5] *Apol.* 39.

[6] *The Death of Peregrinus*, 13.

As a matter of fact, no duty was more often insisted upon than that of charity. But over and above the many individual examples it gave rise to, we must recognize also that it was officially organized. St. Paul had already spoken of the regular collections which were taken up in the various communities.[1] It was not long before each church had its common fund. It was made of fees in money or in material goods, the contribution being weekly, monthly, or *ad libitum*, but always voluntary. These collections formed a part of every reunion of the faithful and were intimately connected with their worship.[2] There were also extraordinary gifts, as witness the case of Marcion who, coming from Asia (c. 139) brought to the church of Rome a present of 200,000 sesterces ($8,000 to $10,000). From the very first the bishop had practically an absolute control over the common fund, but he was assisted by a body of deacons, who from this fact assumed a rather important position in the church.

The first purpose of the common fund was the support of the clergy, for the Church always admitted the principle that the workman was worthy of his hire.[3] What remained was directed to the amelioration of all misery and suffering, especially to the support of widows

[1] I Cor. XVI. 1-15.
[2] Tertullian, *Apol.* 39.
[3] Cor. $9^{4-15}$.

and orphans who were always regarded as the ones most worthy of assistance. The Church of Rome alone maintained 1500 of them (250 A. D.). [1] Next came the sick. The Church prayed for them, but she also took means to render them assistance. A body of deacons, and in the East, as we know from Pliny, deaconesses, were set apart for this work. Together with the sick they looked after all the infirm, whether in body or soul, the disabled and in a word, all the needy. "From the very first, any possessions of the church were characterized as poor-funds, and this remained true during the early centuries." [2] The best voucher for the deep impression made by Christian charity is Julian the Apostate's unsuccessful attempt to reproduce it in the State-church. Finally, the Church made efforts to secure an honorable burial for the dead, especially the poor, whose souls she would help by her charitable intercession, even beyond the grave.

The Church also directed her charity to certain social evils and thus effected some change in social conditions. She bent all her energies to remedy that evil of antiquity, namely, slavery. By renovating the soul of the slave with virtue, by preaching kindness to the master, by favoring emancipation, the Church without raising the

[1] Together with a hundred of the clergy. Harnack reckons that the fund expended amounted to between $25,000 and $50,000.

[2] P. 161.

" slave question " brought about many notable reforms in that evil and little by little prepared the way for its abolition. [1] On the other hand the Church taught the nobility of labor, and she never failed to recall this duty to her children, and even supplied them with the means of work. It was recognized that every Christian brother had the right to a bare provision for livelihood which was given him. If he was invalided, he was supported ; if well, he was furnished with work. Naturally, there was a duty corresponding to this right of the faithful. [2] This made each Christian community become — the anachronism is merely in the expression — an employment bureau and a syndicate of mutual assistance.

Such was the usual manner in which Christian charity was exercised. It had also to meet unexpected and sudden misery. In the time of persecution, the prisoners were visited, consoled and assisted by their brethren. All the acts of the martyrs are full of such examples. Care was likewise given to those languishing in the mines. Licinius, the last persecutor was constrained to decree that no manner of assistance was to be accorded to prisoners, under penalty of sharing the same fate. [3] Such a decree is evi-

[1] These conclusions of Harnack are, as Fr. de Grandmaison has remarked (*Etudes*, Aug. 1903, p. 310, note 1) very similar to those expressed by Allard.

[2] See especially, *Didache*, 12 ; Cyprian, *Ep.* 2.

[3] Eusebius, *H. E.* V. 8.

dence enough to what extent Christians assisted prisoners. In times of great calamities, such as the pestilence that devastated the cities of Carthage and Alexandria in the middle of the third century, Christian charity was then making itself felt more powerfully on all sides. When the pagans took flight, the Christians devoted themselves to the victims, and buried the dead, some of them succumbing to the disease whilst engaged in these tasks. Nor were they partial, for they gave their help to the pagans as well as to their own brethren.[1] They showed the same practical sympathy and self-denying love in the great plague which occurred during the reign of Maximinus Daza. "When this became known", writes Eusebius, "people glorified the Christians' God, and, convinced by the very facts, confessed the Christians alone were truly pious and religious."[2]

Lastly, the church communities did not confine their charity to their own members, they also manifested it towards the traveller, and in times of need, towards poor and imperilled sister communities. Like prayer, charity was universal in the Church. As early as the Apostolic age, we read of a collection being taken up in behalf of the Christians of Jerusalem.[3] This

[1] We know these details from Cyprian and Dionysius of Alexandria who witnessed them and bore themselves heroically in the midst of the plague. Cf. Cyprian, *De Mort.*; Pontianus, *Vit. Cyp.* 9 f.; Dionysius of Alex. in *H. E.* VII. 22.

[2] *H. E.* IX. 8.

[3] Acts $11^{28-30}$. Cf. Rom. $15^{26-27}$; 2 Cor. $8^{1-16}$.

pious custom was always continued. Dionysius of Corinth felicitates the Roman church upon its charity which it has at all times evinced. "By these gifts, which you have sent from the very first, you Romans keep up the hereditary customs of the Romans"; [1] a century later, in one of his letters, Dionysius of Alexandria, remarks in passing, that Pope Stephen regularly helped the churches in Syria and Arabia. [2] St. Basil informs us that under Dionysius of Rome, the Roman church sent money to the church in Cappadocia at the time of the invasion of the Goths. [3] At Carthage, St. Cyprian raised a subscription of 100,000 sesterces, for the churches in Numidia which were ravaged by the wild robbers of the desert, and we possess his touching letter sent with his envoy. [4]

Pecuniary assistance was the least that the churches exercised toward one another. They also carried on a sort of correspondence, whereby each church was apprised of the joys and trials of the other churches. This was in perfect accord with the saying of St. Paul that the whole body rejoiced or sorrowed with each of its members. From this fraternal solidarity proceeded the letter which St. Clement wrote to the Corinthians in order to calm the troubles of this church, the deputations sent to St. Igna-

[1] *H. E.* IV. 23. 10.
[2] *H. E.* VII. 5. 2.
[3] *Ep.* 70.
[4] *Ep.* 62.

tius and his seven letters of reply, the circular letter of the church of Smyrna in regard to the martyrdom of its bishop St. Polycarp, the letter of the churches in Gaul to their brethren in Asia in regard to the martyrs of 177, and later the correspondence of St. Dionysius of Corinth; of St. Dionysius of Alexandria and of St. Cyprian.

These various relations attest the wealth of intercourse and charity which bound the Christians together and assured the unity of the Church.

Thus united by the same faith and bound together by a common charity, the Christians formed within the empire a truly social body, an organism whose power intensified that of the individual.[1] Within the bosom of each church, the faithful were animated by the same spirit, partook of the same sacraments, held frequent reunions, visited and assisted one another. The religious feeling had become a new and efficacious principle of social cohesion. At the same time, a rigid solidarity bound the churches together thus forming a vast organization which embraced the whole empire. What a sense of stability such an association must have given its members! What powers of attraction it must have exercised on those who were not its members! The community itself, by its organization and its bene-

[1] P. 431 f.

fits, was at the same time a permanent and most effective missionary.

With this fact in mind we can understand the attitude of the Christians towards the empire.[1] At first they assumed an attitude of defiant and disinterested separation. They looked upon the empire as a diabolical power which persecuted the saints, for which it would be punished in a more glorious future. This was the political outlook of the Apocalypse. This is why, even at an early date, the Christian communities which were by no means numerous were filled with the consciousness, in the very face of the strength of the vast Roman empire, that they were the central point of humanity as well as the determining factor of history. The Church never failed to express the staunchest loyalty to legitimate authority. Soon even the idea began to take shape that an alliance between the Roman world-power and the Church was to be effected. Thus for example the apologist Melito recalls to the mind of Marcus Aurelius that Christianity was born in the same hour as the empire, that the former developed within the folds and to the greater advantage of the latter, and that the prosperity of the Church is the pledge and the best asset of greater prosperity for the state.[2] "Marvellous is the fact that at a time like this,

[1] Harnack, p. 240 f.
[2] In *H. E.*, IV. 26.

when Christians were still a feeble folk, he actually recognized in Christianity the one magnitude parallel to the state, and that simply on the ground of religion — i. e., as being a spiritual force which was entrusted with the function of supporting the state." [1] Some years later, Origen shows how the virtue of the Christians is far superior to the members of profane assemblies and how the least worthy of the Church's rulers is more fit to command than any civil magistrate.

Now it is significant that the social attitude of the Church flowed as a whole from her religious doctrine and was maintained by it. It was because of their faith, of their virtue and of their charity, in a word because of their superior moral life that the Christians were conscious of a unique place in the world and in the empire. This is why too, the pagans themselves became more and more interested in the new society as if they confusedly felt that they were in the presence of a force that must prevail over them.

[1] Harnack, p. 262. See a similar judgment in Allard, *Histoire des Persécutions*, 1885, I. p. 382-383.

# CHAPTER IV

## *The Obstacles*

In order to give a complete idea of the propagation of Christianity, and also to pass a competent judgment upon it, we must, after a discussion of the causes that favored it, consider the obstacles that it encountered. Harnack does not give due treatment to this question for he scarcely devotes one small chapter to the "counter-movements" which the Christian mission had to face.[1] He claims that it is impossible to gauge the collective forces for the retardation of the Christian movement because for this, the variety of human aptitudes and needs of humanity together with the development which the evangelical preaching passed through, must always be kept in mind. Hence any catalogue of the causes favoring and operating against Christianity must result in a collection of common-places, the inevitable uncertainties of which rubrical pedantry cannot effectively disguise.[2]

[1] Book III, c. v. p. 467-513.

[2] Harnack reproaches Cardinal Hergenrother for this (510-511). It is true, that the latter does enumerate, in a scholastic way, twenty causes favoring and twenty causes against the spread of Christianity. He shows, to put it better, how each of the former could and was a direct obstacle in the path of the onward spread of the Church. Cf. his *Handbuch der allgem. Kirchengesch.*, I. pp. 109 f.

Any attempt to draw up universal and complete statistics is, we admit, clearly a chimerical pretension. Still with no fixed law to guide us, does not history and psychology allow us to arrive at some general appreciation, adequately correct in the main lines and in the majority of cases? This is just what Harnack himself has done. For in analyzing the chief characteristics of the Christian doctrine and the Christian life, we have seen that he passes over none of the attractive qualities of Christianity in these particulars. Honesty, however, compels him to recognize — yet reluctantly and inferentially — that these very attractions were capable of proving a stumbling-block to the Christian mission. Therefore, we can, if we gather notes scattered here and there together with some isolated sentences, glean even from his very book sufficient data of information in regard to the obstacles which operated against Christianity.

A first obstacle in the path of Christianity was its own teaching. We can easily understand why the worship and even the idea of a spiritual God appeared too austere to many souls, so much so that the Christians, who had neither idols nor sacrifices were accused more often of atheism than the Jews. On the other hand, the worship of the Crucified exposed them all to ridicule. On these two points which were a source of scandal to the pagans and against which the apologists were forced to defend

Christianity,[1] Harnack is silent. He does remark, however, that Christianity in making itself a religion of authority shocked the exacting and always sceptical intellects of the philosophers. Its mysteries especially were the source of the greatest repugnance.[2] Porphyry passes a long criticism on the Eucharist which he takes in a material sense and as an anthropophagic meal and which he condemns as " bestial and absurd, surpassing all absurdity and bestial coarseness ".[3] Lastly, what greater " paradox " could there be for the many, as it was for the Athenians, than the dogma of the last judgment and the resurrection of the flesh ?[4]

Furthermore, paganism was not so weakened as to lose all glamor as the official worship, nor did it lose the prestige of national tradition ; rather it sunk its roots deep into the life of the family and of society. " The whole business lay under a mass of disgust, disdain, derision, and nausea. But it would be a serious mistake to suppose that this feeling was universal. Not merely was everything kept going officially, but many minds still clung to such arrangements and ceremonies. The old cults were freshened

[1] Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 10; Justin, *Apol.*, I. 6; II. 3; Athenagoras, *Apol.*, 3.

[2] Harnack gives the quotations of Celsus (p. 219-220), of Porphyry (p. 222, note 1) and of Caecilius (p. 501, note 3).

[3] In Macarius Magnes, III. 15. cited by Harnack, p. 229, note I.

[4] Harnack does give this a little notice *en passant*, p. 91. Cf. Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, II, *Apol.*, 48; Athenagoras, *De Res.*

by the influx of the new religions, and a new significance was often lent to their most retrograde elements Besides, whether the public system of religion was flourishing or entirely withered, it by no means represented the sole existing authority. In every town and province, at Rome as well as at Alexandria, in Spain, in Asia, in Egypt, there were household gods and family gods, with household customs and religgion, and all manner of superstitions and ceremonies. These rarely rise to the surface of literature, but inscriptions, tombs, and magical papyri have brought them nearer us. Here every household function has its guardian spirit; every event is under one controlling god. And this religious world, this second-class religion, it must be remembered, was living and active everywhere ".[1]

The high morality demanded by Christianity reacted against its interests. The way was clearly pointed out but to travel it was difficult. It was the Christian's duty not only to repress long-cherished passions, but also to avoid all the time the many customs whose offensive character we of today can scarcely form an idea. He had to refrain from the theatre and all the games which occupied such a prominent position in ancient social life. Participation in all public festivals was also interdicted because in the

[1] Harnack, p. 291.

great majority of cases they were intimately connected with polytheism. Luxury in all forms was tabooed, and the Christian was even compelled to give up the ordinary social relations of life, such as visits and meals, because usually they were mixed up with some idolatrous superstition. No doubt, there presently did come a change over the situation, yet we can readily see what a restraint this strict morality produced, especially when Christianity began to invade the upper classes.[1]

Christianity, deeply and ruthlessly drove its "sword" of separation into marriage and domestic life. The Master had warned his children of this.[2] Oftentimes baptism was the occasion if not the direct cause of veritable family tragedies. As Tertullian puts it: "Though jealous no longer, the husband expels the wife who is now chaste; the son, now obedient, is disowned by his father who was formerly lenient; the master, once so mild, cannot bear the sight of the slave who is now faithful".[3] Heart-rending examples of wives being denounced by their husbands and of young women by their *fiancés* were numerous in the stirring times of persecution.[4] In any case, conversion always carried with it a painful separation between the

[1] Harnack, p. 300-303.
[2] Mt. $10^{21}$, $^{34-38}$.
[3] *Apol.*, 3. Cf. Arnobius, II. 5.
[4] Justin, *Apol.*, II.

loved ones, a separation that might easily become tragic in times of persecution. The Acts of the martyrs are full of these tragedies, in which alligned against the Christian's faith are the most legitimate affections of his heart.[1]

One of the greatest difficulties that Christianity had to combat, a difficulty which in the nature of things was to be expected, was suspicion and calumny. Conversion to Christianity meant immediate disqualification. Common remarks such as, " Gaius Seius is a capital fellow, only he's a Christian " were repeatedly heard. Or again : " I'm astonished that Lucius Titius, for all his knowledge, has suddenly turned Christian ".[2] Christians were reproached with maintainnig an absurd teaching and of being inconceivably credulous. Against them too was the fact that Christianity appeared to be a religion composed chiefly of the uneducated and the lowly. In the opinion of Caecilius they were a lot of ignorant men and old women whom people loupoke don with absolute contempt as a lot of out-laws.

Hence it was that there was no folly or infamy that they were not charged with. The majority, educated and uneducated alike, repeated the

[1] Harnack, p. 393-397. He gives the story of the martyrdom of St. Perpetua. More examples are given by Allard, *Ten lectures on the martyrs*, sixth lecture, p. 189-231.

[2] Tertullian, *Apol.*, 3.

charges that they worshipped the sun and the cross and even an ass's head. Some went so far as to accuse them of offering immoral homage to their priests. It was believed that at their nocturnal meetings they indulged in frightful orgies accompanied by the wildest debaucheries, that they butchered an infant and ate its bloody members. Tertullian was obliged to defend the Christians against the charge of being ogres and inhuman monsters. Even the more liberally inclined regarded them, because of their aloofness and their mode of life, as the enemies of the human race and no one doubted that they were, because of their crimes and their magic, the cause of all the plagues and famines.[1] Numerous legends arose which the apologists had to refute, legends so absurd that we could scarcely conceive of their invention were it not for the fact that we of today are in the presence of stories of a like character and can thus appreciate the indefinite capacity of popular credulity.

All these charges were disseminated by public rumor and even sometimes by caricatures and pamphlets; and the unreasoning fanaticism of the mob was often raised to such a pitch that more than once bloody riots resulted. Nor must it be overlooked that these accusations were accepted by the educated classes. For all the

[1] See especially Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 8-9; Tertullian, *Apol.*, 7-8. 40.

pagans, Christianity was a superstition. Merely in their appreciation did they differ when qualifying this superstition. For Pliny, it was a " superstitio prava, immodica "; for Suetonius, a " superstitio nova et malefica "; for Tacitus, a " superstitio vana et demens "; and the Christians themselves are described as " a race rendered execrable by their crimes and worthy of the most dire punishments ". [1] Justin was attacked in public by the Cynic Crescens and charged with these calumnies; " Fronto's attack moved almost entirely on the same level, if it be the case that his arguments have been borrowed in part by the pagan Caecilius in Minucius Felix. " [2] It must be said in all fairness that these gross accusations did not prevail in the face of the true facts of the case and the warm defence of the apologists. In fact, we hardly find any allusion to them at the end of the second century. It is true the Christians were always reproached for their credulous fanaticism, a theme that both Celsus and Lucian delighted in exploiting. Marcus Aurelius in a short, scornful phrase refers to their " obstinacy ", and attributes their readiness to die to ostentation. [3] Still these same old calumnies were revived at the begin-

[1] Pliny, *Ep.*, X. 46; Suetonius, *Nero*, 16; Tacitus, *Annal.*, XV. 44.

[2] Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 9, 31. Harnack gives a brief description of these various calumnies, p. 267-268, 497-499. Cf. Allard, *op. cit.*, p. 117-124.

[3] Marcus Aurelius, *Med.*, XI. 3. Cf. Harnack, p. 210-212.

ning of the fourth century. Maximinus Daza took pains to have various libels fabricated and circulated far and wide among the people, so much so that they were posted on the walls and taught in the schools. [1]

We have given enough to show how far all the forces of public opinion and all the passions of the populace were arrayed against Christianity.

In the circles of the cultured, Christianity was attacked by the pagan philosophers, by two especially, who were a host in themselves, namely, Celsus and Porphyry. [2] These two writers resembled one another in the loftiness of their designs and their literary skill, as well as in the pains they took in studying Christianity and in the seriousness of their attacks. The great difference between them lay in their religious standpoint. Celsus (*circa* 178) writes as a politician bound, though not without some skepticism, on the defence of the religion of the empire. First he speaks as a Jew against Christianity, then taking up the burden himself he plays off the sects against the church and ridicules the gospel history. Although he concedes that Christ was illumined still He was an impostor. His miracles are the result of magic and His morality was borrowed from the

[1] Eusebius, I. 9. Cf. Harnack, p. 495.
[2] Harnack. p. 501 f.

philosophers. The hallucination of Magdalen created the belief in the resurrection. The Apostles, themselves deceived deceivers, repeated all these fables and further exaggerated them, so much so that in his day Christianity, with its errors as gross as its pretensions, had become an insult to common sense and divine Providence. Yet Celsus is not loth to make concessions. He admits its high morality and the doctrine of the Logos. But he makes a strong appeal to Christians for national unity. In a word, Celsus is a patriot and his paramount purpose is to safeguard the higher interests of the empire.[1]

A hundred years later, Porphyry takes his stand on both philosophical and religious grounds, for it is the cause of truth and of reason that he sets about to defend. He made no appeal to ridicule as Celsus had done but confines himself to serious reasoning. He sought first of all to demolish the myths of Christianity by proving that they were not historically founded in Scripture. For Christ as a man he entertained the highest regard, but he emphazised all the improbable traits with which the Gospels blurred His image claiming they could not possibly be genuine. He dealt similarly with the prophetic proof which the Church drew from the Old Testament. He passes a

[1] Duchesne, *op. cit.*, I. p. 147.

severe criticism upon St. Paul whom he represents as an unstable, rude and insincere rhetorician. After having destroyed the historic basis of Christianity, Porphyry directs his fire against three of the fundamental points of its dogma, namely, the creation and the end of the world, the Incarnation and lastly, the resurrection, all of which he looked upon as so many errors. On the other points, however, his own teaching differed very little from that of the Christian philosophers.

The fifteen books of Porphyry against the new religion of Christ are perhaps "the most ample and thoroughgoing treatise which has ever been written against Christianity".[1] His work was the testament of Hellenism, and the efforts which the Christian teachers made to refute it are a sufficient evidence of its masterliness.[2]

Yet, to refute these various attacks, Christianity had but a meagre literature. The text of the Sacred Books, especially in the old Latin version was simply intolerable because of its inartistic style. In the East, the writings of Origen alone were making themselves felt in pagan circles. In the West, Lactantius, at the beginning of the fourth century, deplores the lack of suitable and skilled teachers and authors.[3] Even the influence

[1] Harnack, p. 505. Cf. Duchesne, *op. cit.* p. 402-405.

[2] Porphyry was answered by Methodius, Eusebius, Apollinarius and Philostorgius. None of these refutations has come down to us.

[3] *Inst. div.* V. 1. Cf. Harnack, p. 379-381.

of Origen could not effect a new trend of thought. During the whole of the fourth century, learning continued to be pagan, and Christianity still found the learning of the ancient world in opposition to itself. Not until the great theologians of Cappadocia and St. Augustine was any change brought about in the situation. In the East science never came to terms with the new law. It died of exhaustion but before that Christianity had already secured possession of considerable portion of its heritage.[1]

To all these various foes of the Christian faith, we must add another, for which all the others paved the way if they did not walk hand in hand with it. We mean the political power. The history of the persecutions is well known. It is enough to recall here, that from Nero to Constantine Christianity was at war with the state; the Christians were always the objects of mistrust, and were even more often exposed to open hostility. Certainly there were periods of peace and calm during the reigns of well-disposed emperors. "Yet it would be a grave error to imagine that the position of Christians was quite tolerable. No doubt they were able, as a matter of fact, to settle down within the empire, but the sword of Damocles hung over every Christian's head, and at any given moment he was sorely tempted to deny his faith, since denial

[1] Harnack, p. 510.

meant freedom from all molestation..... We are not to underrate the courage requisite for becoming a Christian and behaving as a Christian. We are especially bound to extol the staunch adherence of the martyrs to their priniciples. By the word or the deed of the moment, they might have secured exemption from their punishment, but they preferred death to base immunity. The illicit nature of Christianity unquestionably constituted a serious impediment to its propaganda."[1]

Yet fearing that he has said too much, Harnack immediately adds: "It is difficult to say whether the attractiveness of all forbidden objects and the heroic bearing of the martyrs compensated for this drawback. It is an obstacle which the Christians themselves rarely mention; they dwell all the more upon the growth which accrued to them ever and anon from the martyrdoms. All over, history shows us that it is the 'religio pressa' which invariably waxes strong and large. Persecution serves as an excellent means of promoting expansion" But is this not deciding a little too hastily a problem of history and psychology, unquestionably rather complex?

Taking all the obstacles in one grand view, just as the Christians had to face them in reality, we find that Christianity had arrayed against it

[1] Harnack. p. 491-492. He refers to the small number of martyrs, a thesis that has been ably refuted by Allard, *op. cit.* p. 134-149.

all the forces that any society could bring against it, namely the power of public opinion, of learning, of prejudice, of the state, of philosophy, and whilst it bore within itself many attractive features, there were just as many of its characteristics which were regarded as weak and repulsive. It is well to keep this always in mind in determining the extent of its triumph.

## CONCLUSION

We have seen how rapid and widespread the Christian movement was; we have also seen in what conditions it was produced; all that remains for us is to draw our conclusion from this two-fold analysis, and ask ourselves the question, whether we are in the presence of an evolution entirely natural in all its phases, or whether we must claim the intervention of divine Providence in the effect produced.

Harnack evinces no doubt in the matter. His whole opinion is summed up in his own words.

"From the very outset Christianity came forward with a spirit of universalism, by dint of which it laid hold of the entire life of man in all its functions, throughout its heights and depths, in all its feelings, thoughts, and actions. This guaranteed its triumph. In and with its universalism, it also declared that Jesus whom it preached was the Logos. To Him it referred everything that could possibly be deemed of human value, and from Him it carefully excluded whatever belonged to the purely natural sphere. From the very first it embraced humanity and the world, despite the small number of the elect whom it contemplated. Hence it was that those very powers of attraction, by means of which it

was enabled at once to absorb and to subordinate the whole of Hellenism, had a new light thrown upon them. They appeared almost in the light of a necessary feature in that age. Sin and foulness it put far from itself. But otherwise it built itself up by the aid of any element whatsoever that was still capable of vitality (above all, by means of a powerful organization). Such elements it crushed as rivals and conserved as materials of its own life. It could do so for one reason: a reason which no one voiced, and of which no one was conscious, yet which every truly pious member of the Church expressed in his own life. The reason was, that Christianity, viewed in its essence, was something simple, something which could blend with coefficients of the most diverse nature, something which, in fact, sought out all such coefficients. For Christianity, in its simplest terms, meant God as the Father, the Judge and the Redeemer of men, revealed in and through Jesus Christ.

And was not this religion bound to conquer? Alongside of other religions it could not hold its own for any length of time; still less could it succumb. Yes, victory was inevitable. It had to prevail".[1]

Therefore, Christianity owes its speedy growth to the fact that it was a syncretistic religion. For on the one hand, all the efforts of the ancient learning of this period unconsciously prepared

[1] Conclusion to Book III., p. 513. Cf. Book II. p. 312-318.

the way for its reception; on the other it responded to the deepest of human needs that these attempts had tried to satisfy. Did not all this take place naturally? Such is the favorite thesis of Harnack. One word will suffice in passing judgment upon it.

No one denies the providential preparations which Christianity encountered in the souls of men, nor the special facilities which it found ready at hand in the Roman world of the first century; [1] but must not the obstacles that operated against its progress also be taken into consideration? These various obstacles, both from within and without, Harnack has slighted almost to neglect, and this is enough to make his exposition bear the suspicious aspect of a panegyric. Yet these obstacles exist. From his own work we have drawn the sketch of these obstacles and in grouping them together we have attempted to give them a little of the coherency that was theirs in history. Side by side with the causes favoring Christianity we must study the causes that hindered its spread. Is not this comparison, by itself, sufficient to neutralize the generous pleading of Harnack? Does it not press us to formulate another judgment?

It has been remarked, and rightly so, that the

[1] It is just on this point that the teleological apology of Christianity rests. This has been well brought out by Alfaric (*Revue pratique d'Apologétique*, Nov. 15, 1905, pp. 150-153). From this standpoint the whole work of Harnack may be considered both a preparation and a *confirmatur* of this thesis.

syncretic tendency of Greek thought was in itself more of an obstacle than a help, because it inclined men to a conciliating and yielding philosophy wherein all paganism could easily maintain its position, whereas Christianity prescribed an austere aloofness and an absolute dogmatism.[1] As a matter of fact, this syncretism found its fullest development in the Gnostic sects and the Neo-Platonic philosophy, two systems which became the most dangerous foes of Christianity. To put it briefly, viewing the facts as they are, we are convinced that Christianity ran afoul of so many tremendous difficulties, that humanly speaking it could never have triumphed.

Moreover, we question strongly this pretended Hellenization of the Christian faith which Harnack makes the second basis of his system. For the real problem, he assures us, is, How did Christianity transform itself so as to become the religion of the world and to draw men to itself as to a magnet?[2] The answer, Harnack confesses, lies in the whole history of dogma and in the whole history of Christian worship. To attempt in a few lines the solution of so mighty a problem is simply impossible. We merely remark, that if Christianity did appropriate foreign elements, it was with the view of making them her own. In a word, the unbiassed study of

[1] P. 512.

[2] Fr. de Grandmaison, *Etudes*, Aug. 20, 1903, p. 471-475. Cf. *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique*, March. 1903, p. 91-95.

history reveals no metamorphoses of successively corrupted dogmas, but rather a development of a specific germ by vital assimilation.

Then another question arises, a question which agrees ill with the radical evolutionism of Harnack. What is this doctrine, and from whence did it draw its wonderful fecundity? Christianity has been compared to a seed which developed naturally in a soil prepared for its reception. It developed and reached a luxuriant growth. All this we are assured took place. But from whence came the seed and who gave it this singular power? It may not be the historian's task to seek out the cause; but the wonderful facts which fall under his eyes make such a research the more imperative for the philosopher. This duty, Harnack has realized and he has sought for the cause. See what he says, in somewhat of a bizzare manner it must be confessed, when speaking of Hellenized Christianity of the third century: "Had she been summoned to the bar and asked what right she had to admit those novelties, she could have replied, 'I am not to blame. I have only developed the germ which was planted in my being from the very first!'" [1] *But who planted it?*

Even granting that Christianity just as it presented itself to the Roman world had a normal and natural development, there still remains the

[1] P. 317-318.

question to answer. Whence came its power of singular adaptation and life? The problem is simply unsolved. If the providential intervention in the development of Christianity be denied, then we are entirely and necessarily at a loss to account for its origin.

With this twofold remark, we can appropriate the eloquent language with which Harnack concludes his work. "Was there anything remarkable, it may be asked in the rapidity with which the Christian religion spread? We have only, it is true, a small amount of parallel material relating to the other religions in the empire, which might serve the purpose of such a comparison; still, my reply to such a question would be in the affirmative. The facts of the case do justify the impression of the Church Fathers in the fourth century, of men like Arnobius and Eusebius and Augustine — the impression that their faith had spread from generation to generation with inconceivable rapidity. Seventy years after the foundation of the very first Gentile Christian church in Syrian Antioch, Pliny wrote in the strongest terms about the spread of Christianity throughout remote Bithynia; in his view it already threatened the stability of the other cults throughout the province. Seventy years later still, the Paschal controversy reveals the existence of a Christian federation of churches, stretching from Lyons to Edessa, with its headquarters at Rome. Seventy years later, again, the emperor

Decius declared he would sooner have a rival emperor in Rome than a Christian bishop.

And ere another seventy years had passed, the cross was attached to the Roman colors.

" It has been our task to decipher the reasons for this astonishing expansion. These reasons, on the one hand, were native to the very essence of the new religion (as vital monotheism and as evangel). On the other hand, they lay in its versatility and amazing powers of adaptation. To say that the victory of Christianity was a victory of Christ is true ; but it is also true to say that Christianity simply supplied the form in which syncretistic monotheism won the day. It baffles us to determine the relative amount of impetus lent by each of the forces which characterized Christianity. We cannot ascertain, e. g., how much was due to its spiritual monotheism, to its preaching of Jesus Christ, to its consciousness of redemption and its hope of immortality, to its active charity and system of social aid, to its discipline and organization, to its syncretistic capacity and contour, or to the skill which it showed during the third century in surpassing the fascinations of any contemporary superstition. Christianity was a religion which proclaimed the living God, for whom man was made. It searched and shook the human conscience. It also brought men life and knowledge, unity and multiplicity, the known and the unknown. It allied itself to Greek philo-

sophy, knowing how to criticize it and also how to complete it. It was able (in an age of decline, of course) to assume command of the intellectual movement and to subdue Platonism. Born of the spirit, it soon learned to consecrate the earthly. To the simple, it was simple ; to the sublime, sublime. It was a universal religion, in the sense that it imposed precepts that were binding upon all men, and also in the sense that it brought men what each individual specially craved. Christianity became a church, and a church for the world ; thereby it secured every possible means of authority, under the sword itself. It continued to be exclusive, and yet it drew to itself any outside factor of any value. By this sign it conquered ; for on all things human, on what was eternal and on what was transient alike, Christianity had set the cross, and thereby subdued all to the world to come." [1]

* * *

Harnack does not conceal the fact that the propagation of Christianity, despite the favorable explanations he has given of it, appears to him " astonishing ". It will even appear the more so, if his thesis is given the needed corrections, which we have pointed out above. And if such

[1] II. p. 336-337.

is the honest and unbiassed verdict of history, we Catholic apologists, have a perfect right to say with Allard : " The rapid diffusion of Christianity... is one of the facts of history which rises superior to all ordinary explanations, " [1] and to take with de Broglie this definite conclusion : " It is a miracle of a peculiar kind, a miracle of history ". [2]

This is why the Vatican Council could number this fact among those justifying the authority of the Church and could make it " a great and perpetual motive of credibility ". [3] For this " admirable propagation " is for Christianity both a sign and a further proof of its divinity.

[1] *Ten lectures on the martyrs*, 11.

[2] *Problèmes et conclusions de l'histoire des religions*, p. 351.

[3] " Ecclesia per se ipsam, *ob suam nempe admirabilem propagationem*... magnum quoddam et perpetuum est motivum credibilitatis et divinæ suæ legationis testimonium irrefragabile. " Constitutio *Dei Filius*, c. III.

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